

THRILLING WINTER  
ISSUE

# WONDER

## STORIES

15¢

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*A Complete Interplanetary Novel*  
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# THRILLING WONDER STORIES

*The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction*



Vol. XXVI, No. 3  
Winter, 1945

## Next Issue



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Fights Against Heavy Odds to Make a Barren Planet  
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**ON THE COVER:** Painting by Earle Bergey depicts a scene in Arthur  
K. Barnes' novel, *FOG OVER VENUS*.

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February, 1945, issue

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## A Department Conducted by SERGEANT SATURN

**C**AREFUL with that Xeno jug, Frog-eyes, you're spotting my space-vest—and with dry cleaners shot to Pluto and gone! That's better, but less noise, please. Old Wart-ears is after my scalp since last issue. He's still sore about that misplaced hyphen, the one that made his name War-tears.

"That tears it," were his exact words, the misguided son of a Jovian cobrax plant. So don't disarrange the camouflage of Uranian mustard blossoms, and we'll take a look through the space warp into time ahead.

From where your old Sarge sits, close to the outer rim of the solar system, **THRILLING WONDER STORIES** has lined up a truly stellar galaxy for your entertainment in issues to come. The next issue, with one of the merriest, looniest, most exciting hunks of rough-cut fantasy ever conceived—**DEVILS FROM DARKONIA**, a complete novel by pee-lot Jerry Shelton—is right up in the vanguard.

What happens to studious, patriotic Professor Huxley J. Bradley when he decides to trade in a 4-F body that the draft board has turned down to an extremely active sales representative of old Nick himself shouldn't happen to a Neptunian chihuahua.

It's enough to say that he actually has to get his own body out of the morgue in order to get out of the pearly white skin of an extremely attractive young lady he happens to be wearing. **DEVILS FROM DARKONIA** is a jam session, as modern as tomorrow, based on the *Danse Macabre*!

With it is **VENUS SKY TRAP**, a fast-moving novelet of adventure, romance and intrigue of that fog-shrouded planet, one of the best written and fastest moving stories ever penned by Ross Rocklynne. And the old Sarge will be on hand with a full basket of hand-picked short stories, articles, special features and, of course, **THE READER SPEAKS**.

But that is only the start—our rocket tubes are hardly warmed up as yet. Other featured stories that will be coming your way, kiwis, include **BABY FACE** and **SWORD OF TOMORROW** by Henry Kuttner, **THINGS PASS BY** by Murray Leinster, **SIREN SATELLITE** by Art Barnes, **FORGOTTEN WORLD** by Ed. Hamilton, **UNDERMOST** by Manly Wade Wellman, **COSMIC CARAVAN** by Ed Weston, **THE ICE WORLD** by Ross Rocklynne, **THE WORLD THINKER** by Jack Vance and **TITAN OF THE JUNGLE** by Stan Coblenz. They're all worth waiting for.

That line-up ought to keep you space bunglers hanging around the rocket ship landing fields whenever TWS is due to come in with anti-grav rays blazing. If it doesn't—hey, Snaggle-tooth, look out for the Uranian mustard blossoms! You'll knock down the screen in a minute, and Wart-ears will spot us!

That did it, you clumsy cosmic doodler!

## LETTERS FROM READERS

**Q**UICK, bring on the letters. Wart-ears won't open his mouth until we finish them. Maybe by that time he'll have gone away or something. Where's that Xeno! The old Sarge needs a bracer before he tangles with the brickbats the kiwis have ready for him this trip.

Some of you message senders may be surprised to find yourselves in this column—since you ticked off your *billets doux* to **CAPTAIN FUTURE**. But since Curt Newton and his futuremen buddies are temporarily camping in the doorstep of our companion magazine, **STARTLING STORIES**, we'll make room for some of their mail here as well as in **STARTLING STORIES**.

We're leading off with an especially fine missive from one of the lads now doing his

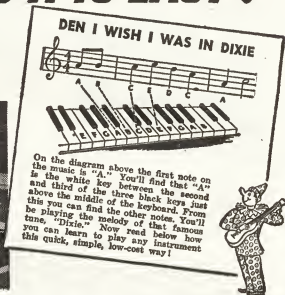
(Continued on page 8)



# LOOKS EASY...

# ...AND IT IS EASY!

— yet, it's from that famous favorite of the South, "Dixie"



## THINK OF IT! Music Lessons for less than 7c a day and you learn right at home, this easy short-cut way

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*yet remain in this one?*



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## THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

bit for all of us with the United States Marines in the Southwest Pacific.

## FROM ACROSS THE INTERNATIONAL DATE LINE

By Pfc Jack Hoffman, USMC.

Dear Sarge: Life is pretty desolate on this little beat-up island where I am stationed, and occasionally the folks at home send me some reading matter to pass the lonely hours. Of course, I always ask them to send science fiction, so I really was delighted to receive the Spring issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE.

"Days of Creation" was superb—more stories like that, please. I usually send my magazines to my girl in New Zealand. As you know, the New Zealanders cannot get any Yankee magazines because of the war. Gad! But that Joan Randall is a knockout! I have been overseas for two years, and I sure would like to pitch my first liberty back in the States with a lovely like that. In fact, she's my favorite pin-up girl, so just ignore any complaints about the artist being too revealing when he paints Joan on the cover.

When some dead-beat puts up a squawk about the cover being cheese-cake, I'm in favor of putting a fellow like that on a lonely island like this. I can guarantee you that there would be a rapid change of mind. That's all for now, and thanks for printing such a swell magazine.—Somewhere in the Southwest Pacific.

Okay, Jack, and thanks for the plug! And now here's our second epistle for this issue.

## CLAMOR FOR KENNEDY

By Joe Kennedy

Dear Sarge: I climbed a flight of dingy stairs and rapped cautiously on the panel of a worm-eaten door . . . three short knocks . . . one long. A small, rectangular slit appeared high in the panel. A pair of fiendish eyes surveyed me piercingly . . . intensely.

"Whatta ya want, bo?" came the slurring voice, doubtlessly hindered by cigarette.

"Jake sent me," I croaked. "Y'know—the Fall Thrilling Wonder." Suspicion reluctantly melted from the eyes.

"Got the ten spot?" demanded the voice.

"Yes," I assured.

"Slide it under the door," ordered the eyes' owner. I complied. This slit in the door vanished. Slowly, the Fall TWS was passed thru the keyhole into my eager hands.

Have read aforementioned mag. Consider it pretty good issue. Ha. Leinster. Ha. Richard Tooker, author of THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY. Ha.aaa.

As thou, O noble Sarge, have probably realized by now, I have at last become the possessor of a type-writer. Rejoice!

Will not waste time talking about the stories. Nope. Nasty old stories. Ughhhh. Who wants to hear about stories. Everybody's read 'em anyway. Yeah. Will talk about THE READER SPEAKS department.

I note Al Weinstein has cartoon in this issue. Gad. I thot I was terrible. Ughhhh. O Allan how cud U??? Enough drive! The letters await us. Onward.

Open letter to Sherman T. Brown III—U cad, sir! How canst thou find within thyself the magnitudinous gall to condemn the brilliant writings of scintillation's most promising writer and exponent—LEIGH BRACKETT?? With only the vastest of indifference can you have underrated her classic composition, VEIL OF ASTELLAR.

To be sure, Miss Brackett may never walk with such immortals as Lovcraft . . . Poe . . . Bierce . . . but by ten billion miles, that gal can whip up the best darn adventure story of any SFfictionist now contributing to the pulps! Mend thy evil ways, O rash Mr. Brown. There may yet be hope for thee. (Aside—your system of dishing out medals is a clever idea, Sherman, ole top. Rather wish I'd thought of it first.)

Benson Perry. Ha. Good letter, puny puns.

Ken Krueger. What? Not a list of stories in order of preference. Great Ghu. Not that. I used to dood it too, but I have reformed. Tsk, Ken, old bean. For shame, for shame.

(Continued on page 99)



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Here is the most remarkable offer that we have ever made. Now you can see most everything you want to see! Now you can bring distant objects so clearly close to your eye that they will seem almost near enough to touch. Why feel frustrated and baffled by something far away that you want to see in full detail. Why be limited in your vision when you can multiply it 13 to 15 times with the amazing super-powered lenses in this GIANT telescope. Quickly overcome the handicap of distance... the magnification does it like magic. This new telescopic invention is a miracle of mass production economy and engineering ingenuity. Made of available war-time materials, it is the equal in performance of telescopes that sell for as much as \$15.00. Think of the wonderful fun you can have by extending your vision 30 miles in full clear detail. Read on for full explanation of this really remarkable invention.

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The GIANT SUPER-TELESCOPE has several precision-ground highly polished lenses. It extends to 4 feet in length, giving clear focus. It is light in weight, sturdily and handsomely constructed, with a wide magnification field. You don't have to know anything about telescopes to use it. Simply hold it to your eye, extend barrel, and all the wonders of scientific vision will be close up to your eyes. Because of mass production economies, we offer this telescope at an unbelievably low price. See birds, ball games, sporting events, beaches on the beach, ships and planes, in full detail. See people when they cannot see you. See wild life, mountains, the heavens in their full natural beautiful detail. The price of the GIANT SUPER-POWERED TELESCOPE is \$2.98 with this introductory offer. Most telescopes of this lens construction and size sell up to \$15.00. We cannot assure you that the supply will last so you must act fast!

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# FOG OVER VENUS

An Amazing Complete  
Novel

By  
**ARTHUR K. BARNES**

## CHAPTER I

### *Gamble in Pioneering*

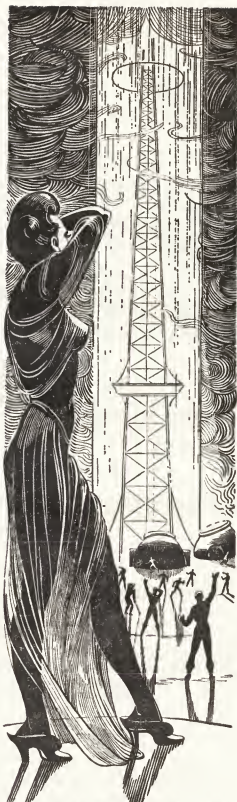
The transition, in the history of Venus, from frontier wilderness to progressive civilization, was not the customary gradual process. It was telescoped into a few short years largely by the efforts of one man, John Buckmaster, whose familiar face and form may be seen in immortal bronze in nearly every city and town on Venus' only continent. Such has been the controversy over the beneficent achievements of this engineer, that his exploits now lie in the realm of myth and legend.

*Universal History, Vol. 3—Hamilton.*

**S**O MUCH for the poor historian, with his nose to the factual grindstone! Never were his limitations more thoroughly manifest than in this instance when, with his glib and sterile prose, he dismisses as mere mythology one of the most fascinating chapters of Man's conquest of the worlds.

As this is written, the author has before him several books—histories, journals, bound newspaper volumes—a bit of an old folksong, the cracked and yellowing scrap of a famous ad-film and a yet unpublished diary. Within them lies a great story, one of struggle and heartbreak and triumph over bitter odds. Its protagonist is a man of heroic proportions. Whether one applauds him or hates him, he demands the attention without equivocation.

So that future historians will not cheat their readers because of any literary blind spot, the epic of John Buckmaster deserves,



A cabaret girl stood gazing at Buckmaster's sun tower, shielding her eyes against the brilliance

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# Pioneer John Buckmaster Fights Against Heavy

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however inadequately, to be re-told.

Where he came from, no one knew. Or if his antecedents were known to anyone, the secret was well kept. He simply materialized one morning through the fetid Venusian mists, moving quietly along the electrified barrier that surrounded the frontier town named, with bitter wit, Venusopolis. As he approached the entrance, the condenser capacity of his body activated a weak lamp. He checked his gun, medipak, and remains of his rations in an outside locker and allowed the photoelectric spy-ray to check him over for concealed weapons.

Somewhere in the gray fog came a hoarse squeal and angry thrashing as some monster blundered into the protective barrier and got well burned for his carelessness. A handful of armored insects whizzed shrilly past in the murk, snapping through the jungle growth like so many bullets. A hot rain drizzled down, smoking off the coppery roofs of the scattered buildings within the town.

When it ceased, the air would again become thick with Venus' thousand and one odors—cloying flower-perfumes, musk-like animal smells, the sweet scent of blood, and the ever-present effluvium of decay. The oily river which moved sluggishly around the town was filled with queerly anonymous chunks of debris, as if the very heart of the continent were rotting to fragments with disease, then crumbling and being washed away.

Through this drab world of destruction John Buckmaster moved with the unconcern of the experienced pioneer. Having given the right answers to the spy-ray, he entered Venusopolis and stepped into one of the handy quarantine booths. The last lynching in that town had been caused by a botanist who thoughtlessly brought an epidemic with him from the jungle.

Quickly Buckmaster stripped, allowing antiseptic rays and gases to sterilize clothes and body. Though he was not tall, his shoulders nearly split open the side walls of the little stall. Massive muscles rippled beneath a skin that had "prospector's pallor," the

result of too long a stay under Venus' clouds without benefit of ultraviolet.

**R**ITUAL completed, he dressed and entered the town proper, an ugly collection of cheap and cheerless pre-fabs scattered about, with an occasional resort or gin mill. A rickshaw, pulled by a stooped and scaly infected native, rolled through the mud to the largest and gaudiest of these gambling joints. On it was the single word, "Belle's."

At this hour of day there was only one customer, a tall, lean man in his middle thirties, with the half-worried, half-bored frown of a chow dog. He stood before a roulette lay-out, making a peculiar bet which the croupier seemed to find annoying. He wagered thirty-five chips, worth five credits apiece, placing one on each of the available thirty-seven squares except numbers one and zero. The croupier spun the wheel, flipped the ball.

"Twenty-two," he said resignedly. "Twenty-two wins."

The lean man's grin was a brief candle, quickly flashing, then extinguished. At odds of thirty-five to one, including the chip on number twenty-two, he now had thirty-six chips. He was five credits to the good.

Buckmaster moved quietly alongside. "How long has this been going on?" he asked the croupier.

The gambler looked sour. "Every morning he does it. Just the one bet. Every day he wins five credits. I ask you, is it sporting?"

"I'm not here for sport," said the lean man. "I'm waiting for a friend, and it takes five credits a day to live in this dump. I figured the odds in my favor were pretty good when I started out on this stunt, and so far I haven't hit the one or the zero yet."

"Ah!" said Buckmaster. "The scientific mind."

The lean man's head snapped back, he whirled to look at Buckmaster for the first time.

"John!" he shouted. This time his smile was more prolonged. "So you really made

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## A Friend of Humanity Pits Himself Against the

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## Odds to Make a Barren Planet Bloom Anew!

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it." There was huge relief in his voice.

Buckmaster nodded. "I said I would. And I did. Fred, have you been wasting your time worrying about me?"

Fred Carle cocked an eyebrow. "You've been roaming through this pest-hole for five straight months—enough to kill off the toughest old sour-dough on the planet."

globe would think twice before robbing her."

"Let's go."

They moved down the long gambling room to the office at the rear. Buckmaster knocked shortly and went in. A blond woman of thirty or so, tall and solidly built and dressed in the immemorial tradition of the gambling queen, looked up from a desk. She was Belle



"You fools!" screamed Belle Courtney. "Stop! Listen to me!"

"Forget it. I did everything I started out to do. Now we're ready to go places. Where's that precious baggage of yours?"

"Right here at Belle's. She has the biggest safe in town. And since she's a woman, I thought even the hard-shelled crew of thugs and murderers hiding out on this rotten

Courtney, best-known and most popular person on a planet rich with rowdy and colorful characters. Her lips curled up in a wide, astonished grin of delight.

"Well, John!" she cried in a husky voice. "So you really made it." She wagged her head in admiring wonderment.

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## Greedy Maneuvers of a Sinister Tycoon!

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Buckmaster smiled. "Just what Fred said."

They shook hands man-fashion, though there was more than just friendship in Belle's eyes. She looked at Fred Carle.

"Your stuff's still in the safe, Fred. Want it?"

"Please. And thanks a million for keeping it."

Belle manipulated the dials and switches of a complicated burglar-proof old-fashioned steel box and withdrew two large, heavy suitcases. The men each took one.

"On your way?" the woman hazarded.

Buckmaster nodded. "But we'll be back soon, with the tools to remodel this whole planet and make it fit for humans. When we return we'll bring civilization with us."

No one smiled at the grandiloquence. There was a quiet, confident power about John Buckmaster that gave his words prophetic meaning. Instead, Belle Courtney poured a toast.

"To the new Venus, and its master," she said.

They drank it solemnly.

As Buckmaster and Carle turned to leave, Belle spoke again.

"Fred says you hope to interest Ichabod Devaux."

"Right."

"You know what kind of a reputation he has?"

"Thoroughly." Buckmaster had a nice smile when he wanted to use it. "Look. Surely you're not worrying about me!"

"Of course," Belle said half jokingly. "You know my hopeless infatuation. 'You persist in doing such reckless things and Devaux's mighty had medicine in his own league, John. Still, I suppose you know your own business.'"

"You may rely on that, Belle. Thanks for the kind thoughts, though."

**W**ITH the steaming rain beating against their shoulders, the two men marched through the mud to the government land office. Here Buckmaster filed several applications which he had produced from an airtight wallet.

The clerk pored over them several minutes.

"Two permanent land claims, one for each of you," he said. "You understand, of course, that a person may own outright only one section of land."

Buckmaster agreed.

"These others, then, are government leases," the clerk continued. "You under-

stand, also, that these government-owned leases expire within a year unless certain specified improvements are carried out?"

Buckmaster again agreed. The clerk checked the requested leases on his huge map of Venus. They seemed to follow an irregular course down the entire length of Venus' only continent. The clerk looked curiously at his customers, but managed to say nothing as he completed and certified the registrations. Then he checked the locations of the two permanent claims. This time his astonishment was too great to be suppressed.

"But one of these seems to be on the top of Mt. Apollo!" he burst out. "It's over four miles high, the highest mountain on the planet. Do you mean you actually climbed it, and left your markers and everything?"

Buckmaster nodded imperturbably.

"You must be the first Earthman who's ever managed it, then. And why? You couldn't pick a more worthless and inaccessible spot on Venus."

"Maybe he likes the view," suggested Carle.

The baffled clerk gave a shrug. Having become convinced he was dealing with harmless madmen, he finished the filings. As the men turned to go, Carle could not resist one last dig at the bewildered clerk.

"Mark this date well, young man. In years to come you'll remember it as one of the red-letter days of your life."

Outdoors, the rain had ceased. A sticky breeze brought with it occasional clots of spores and ugly bacteria, rendered harmless as they passed through the protective UV screen which rayed out from a central tower umbrella-fashion. Carle hailed a double rickshaw, and for the last time they rolled through Venusopolis' muck. This final trip ended at the space-port, where Buckmaster's sturdy little Hartz-Cunningham nestled patiently in the starting cradle, completely covered with preservative grease.

"Not much to look at," said Buckmaster. "But she'll be home to us for a few weeks."

"Blasting off for Earth right away? Aren't you going to eat or get some sleep first?"

"Plenty of time for that en route. As it is, life's too short for the things that lie ahead of us, Fred. Let's go."

Carle stowed the baggage and made last-minute mechanical checkups in a preoccupied manner. As Buckmaster returned with clearance papers and a pre-plotted course

chart from the Port Chief's office, his friend spoke hesitantly.

"Belle was right about that Devaux, John," he said. "I'd enjoy this adventure a lot more if we didn't have anything to do with that man. Is it absolutely necessary?"

"No, but I have reasons. I'll tell you in due time, Fred."

Carle strapped himself in place for the blast-off. "I don't like it," he said, and shivered suddenly, almost forebodingly.

## CHAPTER II

### *Vision of Empire*

**I**CHABOD DEVAUX was among the ten wealthiest men on Earth. Tall and slender, with iron-gray hair and ice-gray eyes, he looked every inch the wicked financial tycoon. It was whispered that he had made almost as many enemies as dollars, a rumor of which he was proud. He had started with a shoestring and gone straight to the top by kicking his friends in the face. He was that kind of man, and he showed it.

He stared coldly at John Buckmaster and Fred Carle. "Young men, you have forced your way into my office by hypnotizing my secretary, threatening my bodyguard, and giving everyone you encountered ingenious excuses. I trust all this enterprise and energy is not being wasted in an effort to sell me an encyclopedia."

Buckmaster was calmness personified as he sat down in a luxurious Body-line chair. "Not an encyclopedia, Mr. Devaux," he said. "A partnership."

"You're too generous."

Buckmaster ignored the sarcasm. "You're a big man, Mr. Devaux. Own many properties, wield considerable power."

"I treasure your compliments."

"But compared with what I'm about to offer you, everything you've achieved in a lifetime will look like so much chicken-feed."

Devaux's eyebrows raised, on the outer edges, to form a shallow V.

"So?" he said.

"I hold out to you on a platter—not a fortune, nor even an empire—but a whole world! The planet Venus."

Devaux choked and began to laugh. "Venus! A magnificent gift, indeed. Why, it's nothing but a raw, ill-smelling frontier, a

pesthole whose chief products are monsters, disease, and—adventurers. I detest all three."

"Exactly, Mr. Devaux. Well put. Venus is an undeveloped pioneer planet today. A place where men take incredible chances in the hope of striking it rich before jungle death cuts them down. For each lucky one, a hundred fail or die. Most people regard it simply as the place where Gerry Carlyle gathered some of her finest specimens for the London Interplanetary Zoo—but believe me, Venus is ripe for exploitation. It's a plum to be picked off by the first man who offers a solution to the age-old problem of frontier development—transportation."

"Um." Devaux had forgotten his ironies. He ran two fingers along his thin, rapacious nose.

"No need to tell you that law and civilization always follow transportation in a new world. That's history. Now at present there's no sort of transportation on Venus offering economical movement of supplies and passengers. Planes are impossible in the eternal mist. Rocket ships can move over a planet's surface, of course, but the necessarily constant blasting against gravity makes this impracticable for a business enterprise. Take-offs and landings are especially prodigal in the expenditure of fuel. Even flimsy passenger crates, guided by radio beam, are fearfully expensive to operate. Rockets would have to carry more fuel than freight, actually. Mathematics will prove that, irrefutably."

"Yes, you've made your point. But then what? Do I gather that you and your friend have the answer to this knotty problem?"

"Absolutely." Quietly but compellingly Buckmaster pictured the Venusian continent as checked by countless orderly plantations, dozens of productive mining ventures, small industries, all neatly linked together by feeder systems to a main transcontinental trunk line. "And as owners of this system, of course, we will be literally the masters of an entire world."

Devaux's eyes had begun to glitter. He was interested.

"Show me," he said abruptly.

The three men went up to the roof garden, where Carle opened the two suitcases and began to set up his demonstration. Buckmaster showed Devaux a multi-celled plaque, about one foot square, constructed of an odd-looking alloy.

"The Buckmaster Thermocouple. It's a new conception. I had the original idea, but

Carle—he's an experimental physicist—developed and improved it tremendously. It transforms sunlight into a beam of power which stretches between two broadcasting and receiving towers like a string. See?"

Carle had placed two spindly structures about twenty yards apart, almost like twin Eiffel Towers. Taking the two model thermocouples, he put them face upward in the sunshine and attached tiny cables from them leading to the towers. Then he took from one of the bags a little vehicle, roughly cigar-shaped with a box-like contrivance sitting atop it like a wart.

"Show him, Fred," commanded Buckmaster.

CARLE ran his fingers through his hair in a worried gesture.

"This thing on the car is a sort of armature, you might say," said Carle. "The power beam passes through it. There's some electrical leakage from the beam, and the leakage is what the armature operates upon."

The scientist stooped, put the car in place, moved a tiny switch. Instantly it flashed along the invisible line between the two towers in uncanny fashion, to smack solidly against the further one. There it hung suspended in mid-air, apparently by black magic.

"This is only a toy, of course," continued Carle. "You could jerk the model off the beam with a good yank, but with a full-sized car and high power beam, it would be as safe and solid as a monorail and completely immune to Venusian fog or weather."

Devaux's eyes were definitely predatory now. He inspected the layout closely, trying to see the power beam which was undetectable except for an occasional sparking or hum. He ran the car back and forth several times.

"You say this is, in effect, a beam of electricity?"

"No-o. It's electronic in nature. But to be frank, we're not exactly sure what it is. The discovery was made almost by accident. More than that we'd rather not say yet."

"How much will it cost to operate your full-scale system?"

"Not a single cent. That's the beauty of the plan. Our source of power is the Sun, inexhaustible. On Venus, twenty-five million miles nearer the Sun than we, there's an inconceivable amount of power available just for the taking—given a science that knows just how to take."

Devaux walked with nervous jerkiness to the parapet and back again, which was as near to showing excitement as he ever came.

"There is a bit of a hitch in your scheme as I see it," he said. "Just how are you going to make use of sunlight through three or four miles of presumably impenetrable Venusian clouds?"

Carle's quick grin flashed momentarily, and he looked at his partner. Buckmaster produced a cigarette, lighted it, and blew a perfect smoke ring. He pointed at it.

"Vortex ring," he replied. "All the energy in that ring is chained within itself. Similar principle is now used in a small way in factories to disperse soot and smoke and dust high into the upper atmosphere, so as not to contaminate the city air."

Devaux stared. "You mean to say you can punch a hole clear through the mists of Venus? Why, it'd take a fantastic amount of power to maintain your openings."

Buckmaster shook his head impatiently. "You still don't grasp the fact, Mr. Devaux, that we have on hand more power than any human being ever dreamed of before. Unlimited. It's the cheapest and most plentiful element of the entire operation."

The financier pondered some more. "True. True. But you won't have access to that power until you carve at least one hole through the fog. Where will you get the power for that initial carving? Have you bright young men thought of that?"

Buckmaster sighed faintly. "You underestimate us, I'm afraid," he answered. "Have you ever heard of Mt. Apollo? No? It's the highest point on Venus. So high that it pierces the mists half the time and is exposed to the Sun. This same peak is the one that enabled early astronomers to calculate Venus' rotation. It will enable us to generate our first power beam without interference and shoot it down to a receiver below."

"From there on we just run our chain of towers across the continent as far apart as possible without permitting the planet's curvature to interrupt the beam. With the power from one unit, we open up the clouds and tap the sunlight, then shoot the beam to the next unit, open the clouds again, and so on."

Devaux was sold. It could be seen in the excited way he prowled about the roof. Greed and lust for power almost visibly oozed from his skin.

"If I should go into this proposition—if, mind you—it must be understood, as always





Carle got a clear shot at the monster as it swooped

in these cases, that the investor retains control of the company," said Devaux. "At least fifty-one per cent of the stock must be mine."

Buckmaster laughed outright. "If I insisted on control, you'd spit on the mere suggestion. That's the way I feel about your proposition. Fifty-fifty, Mr. Devaux. That's the only way we can do business, and you know it."

**F**OR A moment something ugly showed in the depths of the millionaire's eyes. "I see. I put up the money, millions of dollars, no doubt. Whereas you put in the patents for your inventions. That it?"

"Exactly. Carle will supervise building the scientific equipment, and I'll engineer the project."

"You know a call from me would bring a dozen guards," Devaux said thinly. "I could relieve you of that thermocouple and your demonstration apparatus and any other designs you may be carrying with you, and be in a position to form my own company. Your energetic assistance would no longer be required, and certainly no law officer would take your word over mine."

"Yes, you might be able to get away with that. But you won't try it."

"And why not?"

"Because I own that vital mountain-top, that's why," was Buckmaster's gentle reply.

With those words Buckmaster lashed Devaux as if with an invisible glove. In effect he told the millionaire that he had come there expecting treachery and was prepared to counter it. It was a challenge. Devaux's face tightened so that the bones became prominent. He stared at Buckmaster a long while.

"I believe you and I can make a deal," Devaux said at last. "Leave me whatever you have in the way of engineering estimates. Call me Monday morning, about ten." He smiled.

It was the smile of a hangman as he adjusts the hood. . . .

Back in the hotel suite, with the precious inventions secure in a safe-deposit vault, Carle's accumulated fears and worries burst out.

"I don't like it, John," he said. "Now I've seen Devaux, I trust him less than ever. He's a— a shark. A financial shark. I think we're fools to have anything to do with him. We're children compared to him in the world of business. He'll smash us with about as

much mercy as a shark feels for a sardine."

"Of course he will—if he can."

Carle's eyes widened. "You mean you deliberately went to Devaux, knowing that he's going to crook us out of the picture?"

Buckmaster was as calm as Carle was jittery. He was relaxed in a comfortable Flex-air by the room-length window, as if he intended to stay there until Monday morning, imperturbable as a figure carved of stone.

"Yes," he replied. "I did. I know, sure as Fate, that Devaux will try to squeeze us out. It's the man's nature. He can't bear to share power equally with anyone else. In fact, I think I can guess how he intends to go about it."

"But why, John? Why?" Carle had the jumps in earnest now.

"Venus is on the verge of great things, Fred. Success will require at first an iron-willed, just ruler. But not Devaux. His greed would wreck everything. Nor can two men rule side by side. No, the coming benevolent despot of Venus can be only one man—John Buckmaster."

Carle choked. "You mean you think you can outsmart that old fox at his own game?"

"Every fox has its hound."

The scientist's brow furrowed in his dog-like expression of concentration as he carefully sought out his friend's meaning.

"Then—let me get this straight. You team up with Devaux knowing he's going to try and steal the whole works from us, because you plan to take it away from him. Your conscience wouldn't let you do that to an honest partner. But Devaux's inevitable crookedness makes anything you do justifiable. Is that it?"

Buckmaster nodded earnestly. "Excellently put. I'll consider our project complete only on the day Devaux signs over control of the corporation to me."

Carle flopped onto a window seat, shaking his head over this curious combination of ruthlessness and high personal integrity.

"Gosh, what a fight that's going to be." Then recollection smote him. "Say! That explains one thing that had me puzzled. When we were on the roof, and you were telling Devaux about your vortex-ring invention, you held something back."

They exchanged glances, grinning. But Carle's amusement slowly died away, and when he looked at Buckmaster again, there was apprehension in his eyes.

"Sometimes I think I don't know you at

all, John. You're so—so implacable."

What he was trying to express was the vaguely defined fear of the little man caught up in the irresistible and destructive tides of a battle between giants. For it was a duel of giants in the making, man against man and man against Nature, with the greatest of all prizes at stake and the forces of the cosmos itself involved.

**A**T THAT very moment Ichabod Devaux was hatching destruction for Buckmaster in his communi-vision conference room, facing five life-size dimensional screens which reflected the transmitted likenesses of five of his most trusted intimates in the subtle art of high financial crime.

"—to form a dummy company at the start, without my name ever appearing in the picture," he was saying. "Between the five of you there should be no trouble landing a government concession for the project. Sun-Beam, Incorporated might make a nice name. It will please the romantic Mr. Buckmaster who thinks so highly of himself and so poorly of me."

The five second-string financiers looked at one another via the screens uneasily. Someone gulped audibly. They had heard that ugly tone before and knew it boded ill, indeed, for the rash person who had dared defy Ichabod Devaux.

"However," pursued the financier, "these government contracts almost invariably have a time-limit clause. Either demonstrate your ability to produce within a year, or bow out. You're familiar with the procedure, of course. Now it was my thought that Mr. Buckmaster just might fail to beat his time limit. Sabotage, you know?"

Devaux chuckled with genuine mirth. Actually he found exquisite pleasure in contemplating the ruin of another man.

"This will leave a mess of partially completed work on Venus, and I have no doubt that the government would be more than willing to accept Ichabod Devaux's generous offer to complete the visionary project at his own expense. Responsible citizens like myself, you know, have considerable influence with the government." Everyone laughed this time.

"So I'll offer to re-finance the project under my own name, with you gentlemen as silent and invisible partners, taking over everything bodily. As extra insurance, we might arrange the original financing on a minimum scale, so that when Buckmaster

fails he will face bankruptcy and be forced to sell the assets of Sun-Beam, Incorporated, to satisfy his creditors. And I will pick up all his debts beforehand, naturally, so no matter what he does I get the Company. In that way we actually lose nothing while easing our two friends out of the picture."

Devaux's associates nodded. It was a scheme beautifully simple and typically merciless. They discussed briefly its various angles.

"Do you have a particular person in mind to—ah—guide our policy on Venus?" someone asked. "An undercover operative, so to speak?"

"Indeed, yes. My son-in-law Loren Hansen, whom you have all met, is a construction engineer. He's done a few jobs for me in a dilettante fashion. At least he's had sufficient experience to know what's bad for a project like this."

The questioner sniggered. "Keeping the dirty work all in the family, eh?"

"We'll have to make sure, of course, that Buckmaster includes the blueprints of his thermocouple, armature, and vortex-ring generators in his contribution to the corporation," urged another voice. "Also the deed to that mountain-top."

Devaux smiled sourly. "Trust you, Hostetter, to put the obvious into words," he replied with customary sarcasm. "Now get this, all of you. I want no mistakes. This thing is big. And believe me, I don't care to what lengths it's necessary to go. Ichabod Devaux intends to be the coming master of Venus."

"Yes, Mr. Devaux," came the assenting chorus, accompanied by obsequious noddings, and Devaux cut them off abruptly with a slap of a switch. He leaned back, rubbing his hands, quite satisfied with himself. He rather hoped Buckmaster would put up a respectable struggle, just to make it interesting. Devaux enjoyed a fight because the dirty fighter always has the advantage.

There would soon be thunder over Venus!

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## CHAPTER III

### *Skirmish*

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The inimitable John Buckmaster is credited with having pioneered the employment of special types of human beings for special types of work. This refers not to the long-used psychological

selection of workers for their proper positions, but the use of men actually biologically different from most, in work making peculiar physical demands.

For instance, Buckmaster's famous Venusian project required men who could live and work on Mt. Apollo, many thousands of feet in height. Having this purpose in mind he hired a group of specially trained men native to the Andes, a special climato-physiological variety of the human race known as the "Altitude Man." They are characterized by large heart, slow pulse rate, great strength, blood with high capacity for combining with oxygen. . . .

Without such shrewdness in using a special type of human, Buckmaster might never have completed the first and most important unit of his historic project. Under the circumstances, however, the Mt. Apollo job proved simplest of all, as not even John Buckmaster could find a type of man who could work in comfort and complete health in the pest-hole of Venus' jungles.

*Journal of a Medical Engineer—Squires.*

**H**ONKY-TONK-ON-JETS it was called—saloon, dance hall, gambling joint, complete in one compact structure, all mounted on rocket jets so that it could simply blast off from construction camp to construction camp as Sun-Beam's mighty project fought its bitter way the length of Venus' continent. Situated on the edge of Sun-Beam No. 2, in the foothills below Mt. Apollo, under Belle Courtney's management, it offered rough entertainment and forgetfulness to the hard-fisted workers who took their lives into their hands every minute of the day.

From her office Belle could see the entire workings, a rough circle of raw earth about a half mile in diameter carved out of the living jungle and kept clear of growth only by constant application of deadly chemical poisons. In the center rose the gleaming metal spider-work of the tower, up, up, clear past visibility in the turgid mists. Hundreds of feet it would rise when complete, bright symbol of Man's defiance against the storms and decay which were Venus' deadliest weapons against the intruder.

Patterned neatly around the edge of the circle were six huge pits, intended as mat-rices for the vortex-ring machinery which would push aside the eternal curtain of fog. Two were complete with concrete floor and walls, but the men still fought seepage and mud slides in the others. The chug-a-lug of the pumps never was silent, night or day.

Beside the spindle-work of the tower crouched the massive hydraulic lift, which would raise and lower completely loaded beam-cars to and from the beam without

apparent effort. Now it was used to carry the welders and materials up to the unfinished top of the tower.

Belle sometimes mused, as she stared at the workings out her window, on the quenchless flame which drove men like Buckmaster to advance, to conquer, even in such ugly and cheerless spots as death-ridden Venus. But more often, and with more practicality, she contemplated the fortune she would accumulate by sweeping in the leavings of Sun-Beam's employees—if the project were successful.

Suddenly a shriek of mortal fear rang out of the fog. For a single instant all sound and activity was suspended breathlessly.

"Blunderbird!" came the dreaded shout.

Everyone began to run. Some fled for shelter. Others, weapons in hand, dashed for the lift platform and were whisked up into invisibility alongside of the tower.

Too late! Death had struck, suddenly and without warning—devastatingly, as death always struck on Venus.

Down from the mist-shrouded tower came a shapeless bundle that had once been a man, hurtling with such frightful speed to the ground that a geyser of mud exploded at the impact. Others followed, floating safely down on parachutes, while the hissing crack of proton rifles could be heard three hundred feet overhead.

Then, dropping out of the gloom like a veritable black angel of the Region of Lost Souls, swooped the blunderbird—a dread creature having twenty-five feet of leathery wing-spread, ten savage claws on each wing, and a beak like the devil's own scissors. With a weird clapping gesture, it caught up one of the parachutes and ripped it to shreds. Only the fact that the 'chutist was a scant ten feet above the soft, marshy ground saved him from a messy finish.

In senseless fury the monster flopped about seeking more blood to spill. The place was a madhouse of sprinting, yelling men. A girl fled wildly along the balcony walk in front of Belle's place. Suddenly a marksman got a clear shot. The blunderbird's head glowed brightly violet for a moment, then disintegrated with a miniature thunderclap. So great was its vitality, however, that it raged about aimlessly for a full minute before smashing into the base of the tower and collapsing into a malodorous, twitching heap.

Belle Courtney had walked outside. Now she hurried over to where the sharpshooter stood leaning heavily on his weapon. It was

Fred Carle. He grinned faintly and extended trembling fingers. "Guess I'm not much of a man of action," he confessed.

"Why, I've never seen a finer wing shot," Belle maintained. "At the crucial moment, too!"

"But not soon enough to save Sanchez' life. Though it would've been a pity to spoil our record." Carle was bitter. "Not a single day has passed since the construction began that at least one human life hasn't been lost."

**B**ELLE grimaced. "But you've equipped the welders with 'chutes. Armed guards protect them. What more can you do? Those blunderbirds will always be attracted and enraged by the torches until the tower's completed."

"Oh, it isn't the monsters so much, though gosh knows we've waged a losing war against most of 'em. It's the disease." He stared up at Worm Hill, where decaying tombstones were like yellow, loosening teeth in the slimy, receding gums of the soil. Already grave-diggers were scooping out Sanchez' last resting place. They didn't allow dead bodies to lie around long. It wouldn't have been pleasant. Nor did they bother with coffins.

"When any one of a dozen fevers strikes, no matter what our doctors do, the man has only a fifty-fifty chance to survive. And of those who do, ten per cent are hopeless wrecks for months or years to come."

A foul breeze sprang up, like a breath from a crematory, and ugly clusters of spores and bacteria cultures sailed aimlessly through the camp. Belle and Carle scraped them off where they clung nastily to their clothing, hastening back to the shelter of Belle's amusement resort. Another man awaited them there, a massive, blond young

giant whose teeth flashed often and who swaggered just a trifle as he walked. He was Loren Hanssen, assistant engineer in charge of unit B—while Buckmaster handled unit C far to the south—a man who knew only too well how handsome he looked.

"Well, well, Carle," he said heartily. "Where'd you drop in from?"

"The factory, of course. Running short of supplies."

"Oh, to be sure. Sorry to greet you with the accident a few minutes ago. Bit of bad luck—that."

"You seem to be having quite a number of bits of bad luck here."

Unit B had been plagued by an epidemic of misplaced tools and odd breakdowns. Hanssen nodded with portentousness.

"Er—suppose there's some technical point I wanted to consult you about on the spur of the moment, Carle," he said. "How'd I get in touch with you at the factory?"

Carle sighed. Only two people in the world knew how to reach that hidden laboratory, Carle and Buckmaster. Its radio frequency was a secret. The workmen who built it had been taken there and returned without being given the slightest clue as to where they were. Even the assistants working in the place at that moment didn't know how to reach civilization. The plant was making the precious thermocouples, the armature for the beam car, and the apparatus with which to push through Venus' mists to the sunlight.

"Hanssen, several times you've tried to find where that factory is. I'm not telling anyone."

"Sounds almost as if you didn't trust me."

"Yes, it does, doesn't it?"

Hanssen laughed easily and strode outside

(Turn page)

## Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

### This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

to where his men were standing aimlessly around, leaderless, shocked into inactivity by the tragedy. One of them, a swarthy, slender chap, hurried breathlessly up to the engineer.

"That was my brodder, keeled jost now," protested the workman. "Why? No protection. We're human. We got de right to leeve. Why don't you protect us welders?"

Hanssen laid a hand on the man's shoulder.

"My dear Sanchez, I am grieved at your brother's death," he blustered with warm pseudo-sincerity. "Believe me, I am. It hurts me whenever any of my boys is injured. We try to take all possible precautions. Parachutes. Armed guards."

"Yah! Chewin' the rag down below when they should have been up there!" Sanchez waved wildly toward the hidden top of the tower.

Hanssen shrugged. "Well, slip-ups will happen, you know. After all, boys, I'm just following Mr. Buckmaster's orders."

"Buckmaster," a voice said. "Lot he cares about a few lives."

For an instant the workers' faces, yellowish from constant use of atabrine and other prophylactic drugs, showed something ugly. A murmur rippled from their lips, a formless threat which had no time for real expression, because Hanssen quickly suggested that they break it up. The group dissolved slowly as the men straggled back to half-hearted work. But the seed of disunity had definitely been planted.

Carle and Belle Courtney exchanged a long look.

"A slip-up, he says," grunted the scientist. "Like the emery dust in the pumping machine. And the girders which are six inches too short. And the low-grade concrete."

**BELLE** answered this with nervous abruptness. "I examined the incorporation papers the other day. Devaux's name doesn't appear anywhere. That struck me as—well—ominous, along with the fact that Hanssen is his son-in-law. Does John realize what he's up against?"

"Yes. He knows all about it. I think it's just what he anticipated. It's no use talking to him about the chances he's taking."

"I know," she said. "I was just worried."

Carle glanced at the woman shrewdly. "About the project or about John?"

Belle smiled somberly. "All right, so I have been wearing my heart on my sleeve.

Just the same, there's a nasty situation brewing here, unless things take a turn for the better."

But things did not improve. The death rate among the workers crawled slowly upward, as half-trained men replaced those cut down by accident and disease. Buckmaster designed a special helmet with a super-sonic element in the crown, which killed all insect and bacterial life within five feet. Unfortunately, however, few men could endure the inaudible vibration for more than two hours at a stretch. Wearing the helmet longer brought on a mild neurological disturbance sufficient to incapacitate the worker for two or three days. So the reduction of man-hour losses, due to illness, was not offset.

After completion of the first stretch there would be infinite power available to bring all science's weapons to bear in the war against the jungle. The workers would be able to live and work in safety and comfort and health. That was one of the things Buckmaster was fighting for. But until that point was reached, the job had to be done at great cost.

In the final analysis, Buckmaster had but one weapon against the natural forces opposing him—human lives, prodigally spent.

To get them, when the lure of high wages proved insufficient, he recruited with a frank advertisement in all the leading tele-film services of the world.

#### M-E-N

Men With Courage      Men With Vision  
No Others Need Apply

Sun-Beam, Inc. wants he-men construction workers with the above qualifications for its project on Venus. The job is hard and dangerous. Despite safety measures our employees daily risk their lives.

Our contract with you will be for six months at high wages. After that period of service you will be free to establish yourself, with every assistance and encouragement by the Company, on plantation or mining property of your choosing within reach of the Beam-line. Preferential freight rates will be allowed. With luck, you will be independently wealthy in five years.

If you have the courage to gamble six months of your life against security and independence, Sun-Beam, Inc. wants you.

They came.

Not in great numbers, but in a steady trickle of man-power. Some lasted out their six months' servitude. Others were shipped back to Earth physically broken. Still more died on Venus. It was like the slaughter on a minor battlefield.



Even Belle Courtney was once driven to protest in horrified pity.

"Is it worth the cost, John?" she asked Buckmaster. "After all, what are you achieving that's worth all this expenditure of blood?"

Buckmaster's answer was to set his jaw in iron-willed determination. Eloquent as he was when speaking of his project itself, he could not express the compulsion of those motives which moved deep inside of him. He might have said that just as Man has always fought for freedom without counting the cost, so has he always fought to progress, to expand, to set out for a new horizon as soon as the old one is crossed.

Progress—Civilization—call it what you will, is one of the most immutable forces of Life. Though John Buckmaster was not in any sense a religious man, he had the singleness of purpose of a fanatic who believes he has an almost deific purpose in attaining some high goal. As the chosen instrument of this force on the planet Venus, what he did was Right, and he dared not be soft or yielding. Utter ruthlessness was his only weapon against the forces opposing him.

All these things Buckmaster might have said, could he have found the words. Instead, his answer was simple.

"I just have to go on, Belle," he said. "I've got to."

With Buckmaster's relentless driving force behind them, the crew at Unit C, two hundred miles south of the mountain range, whipped everything the jungle had to offer. At Unit B, however, little delays and accidents continued to happen, so that what commenced as a seemingly easy job to beat the generous government one-year limit, narrowed down to a grim race against time.

**W**ITH one month remaining, Buckmaster in desperation blasted down the beam to Unit B in his famous, battered old Hartz-Cunningham. He sought out Hanssen, took him aside, and gave it to him straight.

"Hanssen, you're Devaux's inside man on this job."

The blond man was wary. "Mr. Devaux gave me the position, yes. He's my father-in-law, you know. He hasn't complained about my work, has he?"

Buckmaster almost laughed. "Hardly. You've been doing fine from his standpoint, since your primary purpose here is to

sabotage the job so I can't meet the deadline."

Hanssen registered amazed indignation, but Buckmaster paid no attention.

"Never mind the heroics," said Buckmaster. "I've known your true mission all along. That's why all the key watchmen and guards are men loyal to me only. But I preferred to have you around because then I'd always know the source of the dirty work. With you fired, if that were possible against Devaux's wishes, I'd never know where the next knife in the back might come from."

Hanssen tried blustering. "I don't have to take this from you!" he yelled.

"Shut up. I'm making you a proposition—just cut out the petty little nuisances and save yourself for one big try at ruining the project. After all, it's to Devaux's advantage if the work is allowed to reach the verge of completion before being stopped cold at the eleventh hour."

Hanssen's jaw dropped and he goggled, utterly flabbergasted. He started to pretend bewildered innocence, gave it up, tried to act tough, then conceded he couldn't make that stick, either. Finally he grinned and shook his head.

"This beats me. I've heard everything now. Okay, Buckmaster. Have it your way."

This boldness led John Buckmaster into his first mistake—and his last.

Forty-eight hours later, back at C Unit, the communications man plunged into Buckmaster's office with a message.

"The factory!" he bawled. "There's been an explosion. Only one man escaped. All the rest were killed. Everything else is ruined!"

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Jungle Death*

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**B**UCKMASTER'S face was set in such lines of naked fury that the radio man flinched. Devaux had caught him napping. He had thought to buy a respite with his unsettling suggestion to Hanssen. Instead, the enemy had struck like lightning, and Buckmaster's private war had seemingly backfired to kill his dearest friend.

He grabbed the flimsy. "Where'd this come from?"

"Unit B," answered the operator. "The

only survivor made it back to camp just a few minutes ago."

"Was it Fred?"

"No, sir. One of the technicians. He made it in Mr. Carle's ship."

Buckmaster ran for the radio shack, snapped on the private beam from the factory. It beeped steadily. Living quarters at the lab, however, were some distance apart, and might have been untouched by any explosion. He rang them, but there was no answer.

"Any more details?" he rapped at the nervous radio man.

"No, sir. The survivor, whoever it is, collapsed."

Buckmaster slogged through the mud to his ancient Hartz-Cunningham and blasted off at once without even checking his fuel. Straight down the factory's secret beam he rode, over a nightmare of untracked, seething jungle. A twenty-minute dash brought him to the tiny clearing in the midst of nowhere, and he set his rocket down carefully on its slowly contracting pillars of flame. Then he stared.

Factory, living quarters, radio shack—everything was untouched, unharmed. Even as he looked, Fred Carle stepped from the lab with an expression of mild surprise and hailed him.

"What's up, John?"

Buckmaster crossed the tiny spaceport. So great was his relief that he could not answer at once. His back, he realized suddenly, was bathed in cold perspiration. He was not quite the unfeeling machine other men believed him to be.

"Dunno, Fred. A message came through that the place had blown up. No one answered when I called by radio, so I came to find out."

"The radio's in the living quarters, so we can tune in nights for music. No one's around to listen for your call signal except at the hours we specified for getting in touch with each other."

The two technical assistants had trailed out to join Carle.

"Maybe someone wanted to get you away from camp for some reason or other," one of them suggested.

Buckmaster and Carle traded sharp glances.

"No," Buckmaster said. "I'm away much of the time, anyhow."

The answer to their puzzlement came with stunning suddenness, with the sputtering

thunder of another rocket ship as it nosed swiftly down into the clearing. Buckmaster leaped toward the scientist.

"Guns!" he yelled. "Quick! Where d'you keep 'em?"

Why—er—what?" Flustered, Carle wasted three precious seconds. "In the living room."

"Run for cover!" Buckmaster sprinted like a college boy for the men's quarters, followed by the bewildered but vaguely alarmed technicians. It was too late. Death's pale warning seared hissing against the door as a proton bolt cut between Buckmaster and safety. Shock, transmitted on the ionized air, whirled him, dazed, to the ground. The entire group came to a quick halt, hands upraised.

From the newly arrived ship, Hanssen stepped out smilingly, carrying a proton rifle with the ease of long practice.

"Now you're showing sense," he observed. Two other gunmen followed him. "Any more of you?"

"No," said Buckmaster, staggering to his feet. "What's the idea?"

"As if you didn't know. We trailed you here with radar after making sure you'd come in answer to our slightly inaccurate message." Hanssen detailed one of his henchmen to poke through the buildings. "I hope Dr. Carle has about completed his labors on the thermocouples and the vortex-ring machinery."

Carle's stricken expression was answer enough. Hanssen laughed.

"Now just step into my ship, if you please. My colleagues are going to take you on a little journey. I'm staying here to check the work. If any expert help is still needed, you may be brought back. But if everything is shipshape—" He drew one finger across his throat genially.

Buckmaster clenched his fists in an agony of indecision. Sweat began to run down his nose. His friend, his assistants, Buckmaster himself—all to die because he had underestimated the enemy. Buckmaster had no fear of death, only of the ignominy of dying without a chance to fight. The sole question in his mind was whether to make the break now or later.

**H**ANSEN tipped up the slender "barrel" of his gun ominously.

"Inside!" he ordered, indicating the rocket. "And don't console yourself with the thought that there'll be any delay in winding

this thing up, as soon as I've gone over your contraptions here. No boys in blue are going to dash to your rescue."

Buckmaster and the others filed into Hanssen's ship, and their wrists were lashed tightly behind them. There was a pilot waiting for orders, and the two gunmen. Four to three, since Hanssen was staying. At least the enemy force was weakened to that extent.

"Okay," Hanssen said to the pilot. "You know where to go. I'll use Buckmaster's crate."

He slammed the porte. At once the ship began to rise shudderingly, blooming on twin stems of fire, then slid into the steaming fog.

Buckmaster's thoughts raced. Should they be taken to some unmapped pinpoint in the jungle, or a remote island, even if they did manage to overpower their captors and escape they would be utterly lost. Their only chance would be to cruise aimlessly about in the fog as long as their fuel lasted, in hopes of miraculously cutting the path of someone's radio beam. No, the time to act was right now.

Buckmaster lay back on a narrow couch when the guards' eyes were momentarily turned away, and drew his knees up to his chin. Contorting himself in acrobatics amazing for so thick-bodied a man, he pushed his bound wrists down as far as possible, then wriggled his feet and legs over the rope. Having thus brought his hands around to the front of his body, he started to work on the bonds with his teeth. One of the gunmen turned.

"Hey!" he cried, started. "Cut that out!"

Instantly the captives plunged into action. The two technicians hurled themselves clumsily at the gunmen, bumping them off-balance in a cursing, scrambling melee. Fred Carle without hesitation plunged awkwardly the length of the rocket and leaped, bound arms and all, upon the pilot's back. The pilot, reacting with amazing swiftness, slid aside and half threw Carle against the instrument panel. There was a blinding stab of electricity as Carle's body shorted out the controls. His back arched in mortal agony and he screamed once, a last, despairing cry which somehow held a faint echo of final triumph.

The ship rolled as if torpedoed, and Buckmaster was thrown drunkenly against the escape hatch. Lightly fastened, the door sprang open under the impact and catapulted

Buckmaster cleanly out. His last frantic grasp managed to seize the emergency parachute which regulations insist shall be attached to a static line beside all escape hatches. It was this rule which saved Buckmaster's life. With both hands tied together as they clung to the harness, he could never have pulled a rip-cord himself. But the static line worked perfectly, snapping the chute open just behind the stricken ship.

For a timeless instant Buckmaster seemed suspended in an infinity of clammy grayness, with no sensation of falling, no visibility, just nothingness. Then, fantastically, the dying rocket ship returned, swinging about the descending parachutist in a weird spiral. The extreme port tube switches were jammed in firing position, throwing the rocket into a circular plunge. Spewing lop-sided fire, it nosed around Buckmaster like a shark making up its mind to strike.

Buckmaster kicked and struggled to slip his chute toward the center of that deadly spiral. Each time the rocket blazed past, he shouted at the two lab helpers still trapped within.

"Bail out!" he bellowed. "Bail out!"

Finally the porte did open, as the ghostly ship materialized once more on its strange course, and two figures tumbled free. But at that instant a broad, wet leaf slapped Buckmaster's face, and something twitched at the invisible canopy supporting him. He looked down, saw he was but a few feet from the ground. The others had jumped too late. They would smash unsupported into the muck alongside the ship.

As Buckmaster landed there was a terrific explosion barely fifty yards away, and a searing blast of flame so intense that the fog was perceptibly thinned for several minutes. He collapsed his chute hurriedly, chewed his hands free from the cord which had bound them, and made his way to the wreck.

The ship had struck so hard that the impact had split it open like a ripe pod, and fire had gutted it from end to end. So fierce had been that short blaze that there was literally nothing recognizable in the ashes. After waiting for the pyre to cool, Buckmaster poked around for quite some time trying to find anything useful, but he failed even to identify any of the six charred bodies.

**E**VENTUALLY Buckmaster left the wreckage, walked a few steps, then turned to make a queer half-salute. It was

mourning and epitaph in one for the only man he had ever called friend.

"I won't forget, Fred," he murmured. "You didn't die in vain."

Yet even in that tragic moment it was characteristic of Buckmaster that he accepted Carle's sacrifice as the right and natural thing under the circumstances. After all, Carle's work was virtually complete, and it was John Buckmaster who was still vital to the completion of the project. Some men would have considered themselves lucky to be sole survivor of such an accident, but Buckmaster's chief emotions were disgust at having been tricked and fierce determination not to let even this disaster stand in the way of the fulfillment of what he regarded as his predestined mission.

He took stock of his position, found it bad. He was utterly lost in the Venusian jungle without even a compass. He knew he was not far from the factory, but in which direction it lay he had not the faintest idea. So thick were the mists on Venus that not even dawn or sunset could serve a man to orient himself. Light simply came and went in a general diffusion.

Worse still, although he knew the jungle and had explored much of it, outfitted with gun, food, medicines, and compass, now he was practically without equipment in a land where man has nothing but enemies. All he possessed was the inevitable broad-bladed crab knife, tool-of-all-work carried by most jungle veterans, strapped in the thigh-sheath concealed in the left leg of his trousers. None of his recent captors had suspected the presence of that knife.

Buckmaster sat down on a fallen log, blade in hand, and listened to the monotonous drip-drip of the sodden undergrowth. It seemed to mock him. From afar came the enraged hunting shriek of the giant whip, tyrannosaurus-like monster with thirty-foot prehensile tongue. Few men lived after meeting up with a whip.

A land crab scuttled from among some cycads, attracted perhaps by the smoke. Buckmaster cracked it with his heel, then neatly cut it open with his knife. The meat, which amounted to about three mouthfuls, was rubbery and rank-smelling. But it was one of the few bits of edible animal life on the planet. The crab also contained a precious swallow or two of sweetish juice.

Refreshed, Buckmaster began to meditate, reviewing his predicament from all angles, studying and discarding possible lines of ac-

tion. Finally he made a decision. He rose and began scrutinizing the fallen log on which he had been seated, poking at it with his knife in various spots.

"No dice," he muttered, and circled the wrecked space-ship slowly, searching the jungle for other fallen trees. Twice he found promising ones, attacking them with the knife point, but each time turned away disappointed. But the fourth tree brought different results. It was thoroughly decayed in the center, and Buckmaster disemboweled it with powerful, stabbing strokes. A double handful of gray insects, with two-inch bodies and hammer-shaped heads, spilled free.

Smiling for the first time in many days, Buckmaster set one of the bugs on the ground. At once it began to crawl directly away from him, and nothing—neither plants nor débris nor puddles of water—could make it deviate more than ever so slightly from its line of march. Buckmaster set two more of the insects down. They, too, began their dogged creeping in the same direction.

"Compass-bugs, all right," Buckmaster grunted to himself, scooping them all up and stowing them carefully away in his pockets. "Little sweethearts."

For the compass-bug was cousin to that strange tropical insect on Earth which always moves directly to the north, as if there were a lodestone in its tiny skull. Similar insects had saved many a lost prospector on Venus.

Buckmaster knew well enough that the factory and units B and C formed the points of a rather flat triangle. A line between the two camps would run almost straight north and south, with the factory somewhat to the west and considerably nearer to B unit. More important still, rockets traveling along the beam between the two construction camps stayed close to the ground, and their jet blasts and exhaust gases had indelibly marked the jungle by flame and poison for the eye trained to notice such things. By moving eastward, Buckmaster would inevitably cross that line. If he recognized it, he could then follow it north through a hundred miles of green purgatory, to where Hanssen and his gangsters would await him.

Buckmaster faced east, lined up three enormous tree-ferns. If he should lose his bearings, one of the little compass-bugs would set him straight again. He contemplated the frightful journey that loomed before him, shivering as he considered the hideous task before him.

PART of the route would traverse high ground, with impenetrable thickets, and lariat-vines trying to ensnare him, and savage life-forms slinking hungrily at his heels. Part of it would be through swamps whose primeval slime sobbed and gurgled hideously, emitting a sickening stench that turned the stomach. Nightmare, vicious things would nose slobberingly through the ooze. Death would come so near and so often that it would lose all meaning. There would be seeming eons of walking, staggering, falling, and getting up again. His mind would become chaos, his body numb with agony. All this—because of Buckmaster's fanatical devotion to an ideal.

The old Chinese proverb came to his mind. "A journey of ten thousand miles begins with a single step." He took that step, then another, through the thickly clinging mud that subtly drains the strength from even the sturdiest muscles. . . .

Three hours later, Buckmaster dropped heavily upon a hummock to catch his breath. He was covered with ooze from head to foot, and voracious clots of molds were working on his supposedly mold-proof clothes. He had flushed two more crabs and found a handful of wild tomberries. Now he sliced off the tops of several barrel ferns and drank the juice.

Rain began to hiss down in fat, dark drops like hot marbles. Buckmaster laved his cheek and hand where inflammation marked the venomous caress of the silk-fang bat. Any kind of gun could keep such minor pests at bay. Without one, a man fought his way bare-handed through perpetual siege.

The light was beginning insensibly to fade, but nightfall was still some time away. Though his trial had only begun, fiery aches beginning in Buckmaster's legs and lancing clean up into his head, swelled by the tiny protests of each nerve in between, made movement a torture already. But he figured he could make another few miles before darkness, until its fearsome monsters and unknown terrors of the night, overtook him and drove him to the shelter of the tree-tops.

All emotions save one had been purged by the grimness of his ordeal. Neither anger, nor fear, nor hate were left to him. In Buckmaster's soul there was but room for a single flame—his unwavering resolve to return and defeat his power-mad partner in their epic struggle for empire. He was conscious only that he had to get back before it was too late.

He must hurry—hurry. Devaux's glacial, mocking eyes seemed to lead him, like marsh fires, as he rose to fight further through the jungle.

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## CHAPTER V

### *B for Berserk*

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THE CAMP seethed with rumor and counter-rumor. Work was at a complete standstill. First the news about the factory being destroyed somehow leaked out and set the place in an uproar. Then Hanssen disappeared for hours, and word spread that he had been killed. Finally Hanssen returned in Buckmaster's rocket ship, maintaining a tight-lipped silence, and the men began to wonder why Buckmaster did not show up. Twice in the next two days Hanssen blasted off into the fog, returning without a word to anyone.

"Where's Buckmaster? You'd suppose he'd come around just to keep us on the job, if nothin' else."

"Know what I think? He got blown up along with the factory."

"Bosh! I been figurin' this whole thing out. If you ask me, the whole unit C was wiped out by plague. And that means Sun-Beam's washed up. Finished. We're saps to stick around here any longer. I'm gettin' the next ship out of here."

The third day another element was injected into the turbulent situation, a tall, slender stranger who arrived in a sumptuous space yacht. At first the gray-haired man in his immaculate whites, who looked so much like an animate icicle, and who produced a similar feeling of chill down the spine when he looked at anyone, was thought to be a government bureau chief. But soon he was recognized.

"I seen his picture, I tell yuh. That's Ichabod Devaux, the multi-millionaire. Regular financial rattlesnake."

"Says you. Anyhow, whichever he is, he wouldn't come around if Buckmaster was still boss. That proves Buckmaster's through. He's tossed in his hand and beat it back to Earth, that's what I believe. Licked."

"So what happens to us? Who brings us supplies, or who takes us home if we want to go?" Thus fear and uncertainty were added to the turmoil.

At that very moment, Ichabod Devaux and Loren Hanssen were conferring in the company offices. Hanssen was grinning complacently.

"I've really been doing a job here. You arrived at the psychological moment."

"I made my first ten million by seizing psychological moments." Devaux's tongue was acid as ever. "Bring me up to date without too much bragging, please."

Hanssen quickly told of his ruse to trap Buckmaster into revealing the location of the laboratory, and of the subsequent fatal accident.

"I heard the crash and found the wreck a couple hours later with radar. Six corpses, no sign of the seventh man."

"Buckmaster?"

Hanssen shrugged. "The bodies were burned beyond identification. The chances are six to one against Buckmaster being the survivor. But even so, whoever it is, he's doomed. He's lost in the jungle without food or instruments, probably without weapons, a hundred miles from here."

"But too near the factory."

Hanssen snorted. "Believe me, it's a physical impossibility for a human being to orient himself or find a specific spot in the Venusian jungle with instrument or radio help. The odds would be a thousand to one against the man ever finding the factory. Besides, I've been back there twice myself, just in case. I'm the only man alive who knows where it is."

Devaux frowned thoughtfully. "If the evidence never comes to light, perhaps it will be for the best. But I never intended that anyone should be killed. Too risky. My hand must never appear in this thing at any stage, else the Government would never allow me to head the subsequent company—the company which will pick up the pieces here when the time comes. What about Carle's inventions?"

"All complete. Thermocouples and armature were easy to test. There's some other apparatus, six contraptions obviously the vortex-ring generators. I don't understand their workings—it would take a regular super-scientist for that. And there was no power to try 'em out. But they look finished. I've left them at the factory, and left the factory's directional beam going, of course. We can pick up the stuff any time."

Devaux nodded. "Well done. However, we better play our hand with the remote possibility of Buckmaster's return—alive—in

view. We must have the project damaged just sufficiently so that, even if he does return, he'll be unable to repair it in time to beat the deadline. Yet no one must suspect that we had anything to do with it!"

**H**ANSEN interrupted eagerly. "Exactly the way I figured. I haven't told the men a thing. The silent treatment, you know. But I have three or four stooges circling around spreading all sorts of phoney rumors. No one knows what to believe. The key spots are still controlled by men loyal to Buckmaster, what few there are left. But the minute you say the word, we can coalesce all the vague worries and resentments into a fury that might level the construction work right down to the ground if we're not careful to keep it within bounds. That means you'll never need to appear at all. The situation is like a bulging, rotten fruit. One prick of the needle will bust it wide open!" He gestured with his fist.

Devaux's pale eyes widened as he stared at his son-in-law.

"Well! That's remarkable, my boy. I believe I've underestimated your abilities. You've outdone yourself, really."

Hanssen strutted, grinning. "This is called unit B. It's where we'll win a victory."

For another twenty-four hours the crisis was allowed to ripen, as Hanssen's stooges deftly brought the pot of hate to boil. Embittered arguments flared, fights broke out. Finally a delegation of the workers called upon Hanssen and demanded to know the truth about how they stood.

Hanssen surveyed the men with a swelling sense of power. This was his moment. If he acted his role well, as he told his great falsehood, the whole plot would culminate in a complete triumph for Ichabod Devaux.

"I guess you might as well know the worst," he began with an air of resignation. "I haven't said anything before because I was trying to carry on alone, so that all we've achieved wouldn't be wasted. But it's no use. Buckmaster kept too many details in his head. Without him I'm helpless. Buckmaster's pulled up stakes and left. He's gone."

There was a stunned silence. Then, "He's walked out on us? Why?"

"I suppose he realized he couldn't beat the government deadline—and quit."

There was subtlety in this. Buckmaster dead would be mourned as a martyred leader, but Buckmaster fleeing in the face of de-



feat would be despised. Hanssen had a bad moment when he contemplated his position should Buckmaster turn up alive. However, it was a crisis. He had to take a chance just this once.

"The rat!" A Devaux stooge sounded off. "After we've sweat an' bled and died here by the hundreds! All that goes for nothing, eh?"

Hanssen shrugged, portraying the strong, embittered man betrayed.

"Providence sometimes has a way, boys, of wreaking its proper retribution on power-crazed, selfish men like Buckmaster," he said.

The false note rang rather sourly in the gathering dusk, but it went unnoticed as another man quickly took his cue.

"Well, I don't know about you fellers, but I, for one, don't intend to leave the job standing there untouched as a monument to a yellow dog!"

This, too, had a rehearsed air. But hysteria suddenly seized the mob and spread like wildfire, and they streamed in a yelling frenzy up the hill toward the tower and the pits. Night fell, like the dropping of a shroud, and automatically the orange, insect-repellant lights flickered on.

It was a scene straight from Dante. Heat, dank and stifling. The dull clank of a pump. The eternal effluvium of decay, the smell of machine oil. Slickly sweating faces unhuman in the weird glow, with hot, glittering eyes alive with the unholy lust to destroy.

"Nitro!" rose the cry, and the river of men veered toward the explosives shack. The guards were men who had finished their six months' contract and who, with their future dependent upon Buckmaster's success, were loyal to him. But they didn't have a chance against such overwhelming odds. A gun flashed, someone shrieked, and then the entire hut collapsed under the rush. Like locusts the rioters plundered it, then poured onto the knoll.

A staunch little group of loyal miners and planters, to whom completion of the beam-line meant everything, rallied by Belle Courtney tried to stop the avalanche.

"Stop, you fools!" she screamed, trying to reason with them. "Listen to me!"

It was helpless. The wreckers advanced with the inexorability of madmen. Guns were drawn, and for one ugly moment it appeared bloody slaughter would break loose.

But with exquisite timing one of the ring-leaders led the men sharply aside, heading

for the nearest of the bell-shaped pits intended to house the vortex-ring machinery.

"My brother died when this thing caved in last month!" a girl from Belle's place shouted. "Blast it to pieces."

**E**XPLOSIONS were hurled in, and the rebels surged back. Flame and thunder spouted like a bomb burst in the turgid dimness. The earth trembled, rocking the nearby tower. The lights swayed wildly, and fantastic shadows wheeled and bobbed like phantom fighters in the night. Mud and shattered concrete sprayed the hill with their shrapnel.

With a fierce yell of exultation, the crowd raced on about the great circle of craters, pausing only to dump the nitro in and then fleeing to the next pit while red destruction roared behind them.

Then it was done, and the six mighty pits which had cost so much in blood and treasure were collapsed in ruins. Gathering their breath, the rioters eyed the giant tower which speared up far beyond the limits of visibility. Teeth flashed as they moved to the assault. But at that precise instant, as if the cosmos itself were fascinated by the drama being enacted by these hundred insignificant lumps of tormented matter, the mists of Venus shuddered and thinned, drawing back almost like a curtain.

At the edge of the clearing stood a lone figure, ragged, filthy, and hollow-eyed, barely visible in the inadequate light. Silence came like the stroke of a knife, and even the jungle seemingly held its breath. A single course rose into the stifling air, echoed there interminably.

A rioter emitted a hoarse shout.

"It's him! It's Buckmaster!"

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## CHAPTER VI

### *Man Against the Cosmos*

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**F**EAR and hate awaited John Buckmaster as he stepped from the jungle. He saw it in the buttery faces, the insanely watchful eyes, the air of crafty triumph. That hate was almost a tangible thing, that fear a wall, a living pressure that sought to contain him in the world of the dead whence he had returned.

But Buckmaster gathered his strength and

began to walk toward that mob of men, past the shattered ruins of his dream, with the squelching sound of his boots distinct in the stillness. The members of the mob wavered, braced themselves and tried to stare him down, but fell aside as he marched through them and down to where Loren Hanssen stood waiting. The two big men looked at each other wordlessly for long moments. Finally Buckmaster spoke.

"Hanssen, you are an accessory before and after the fact of the abduction and murder of Fred Carle and his two lab assistants. You didn't quite have the nerve to do your own dirty work, but here's one fight you won't dodge."

Buckmaster struck, with all the pent-up grief and fury that had simmered within him during the past four days of torture. Hanssen staggered back, reeling, his face red ruin as a smashed nose spouted blood.

He came back weaving, fighting with courage and skill, and he was fast for so heavy a man. He moved around lightly, jabbing and hooking with a capable left hand. Once he caught Buckmaster skidding awkwardly in the uncertain footing and clubbed home a right across the temple, knocking his man to his knees in the mud.

But he had nothing to match the righteous flame that animated his antagonist. Buckmaster walked in slinging his fists as if they were iron weights. When they landed, the sound was that of an ax on a side of beef. Hanssen's lips burst like mashed grapes. His brows sprouted blue lumps that half-closed his eyes. Several gasp-drawing body blows made him shiver like a stricken oak. Those blows were terrible. They took the spring from his legs, and soon Hanssen was no longer the dancing master. He was forced to exchange punch for punch, with the increasingly horrid feeling that his own punches were bouncing off an impervious mask.

The end was inevitable. In less than five minutes of brutal slugging, Hanssen was reduced to a shapeless lump of bruised and bleeding flesh, unconscious in the slime. Buckmaster stepped back to draw a long, shuddering breath, and peered around the circle of spectators.

There were no visible signs of opposition in the workers now. They were a tough crew, quick-tempered, rowdy, even criminal, but no man there had ever witnessed such concentrated savagery as that which had

smashed down Loren Hanssen. They drew back, awed and silent.

"Scum!" Buckmaster lashed at them with words of searing scorn. "Sniveling brats, busting up the toys when you think you can't play any more! To think that scourgings such as you must be depended upon to bring forth into being the vision of this new world that was conceived by my brain!" He spat his contempt.

"We're carving the fundamentals of a civilization from the wilderness here," he continued furiously. "That has always taken blood and suffering. It always will, to the end of Time. Sure, there's been disease and death. I warned you about that before you signed on. Sure, I'm a slave-driver. I've got to be. Look at the penny ante pioneers I've had to work with! There'll be still more ruthlessness and disease and death before this project is finished. But the stakes are higher than any you've ever played for before. The risks are always great in a big gamble. No tin-horns are wanted to sit in at this game!" Buckmaster bludgeoned the men with word and glance.

"Next time you hear I'm washed up, don't be in such a hurry to believe it. Because nothing—nothing is going to stop John Buckmaster from completing what he started out to do. If any of you punks have lost your spines, you can get your time and take the next rocket out of here. But remember—to-night Buckmaster will be the paymaster!"

It was big talk, blunt and compelling. A restless mutter rippled over the listeners, but no one moved to take up Buckmaster's offer. An indefinable change had come over them. There were sheepish grins, shamed head shakings. The Boss was back, and he was still the Boss. No argument.

Sensing this, Buckmaster turned and cleared his raw, aching throat.

"Devaux!" he cried out. "Ichabod Devaux, I know you're somewhere near! Come forth!"

The crowd surged, parted briefly to allow the slender, white-suited Devaux to enter the churned-up, muddy arena. The financier was as coolly unruffled as if he had just left his valet. Tension began to build up again as he and Buckmaster faced each other expressionlessly, like two poker experts playing for gigantic stakes.

**D**EVAUX showed his ace first. "Congratulations, partner, on having handled an awkward situation," he said in

amused and faintly superior tones. "Unfortunately your dramatic return was a bit too late. The men, laboring under a regrettable misunderstanding, have so badly damaged the project that you'll never be able to finish it in time to meet the government deadline. Only a half month left, you know."

Buckmaster nodded. "Something in what you say, all right. The pits are ruined. On the other hand, you as well as Hanssen are an accessory to the kidnapping and murder charges. You're not on Earth, remember. Your money and influence are worthless here. You would be tried in a Venusian court presided over by a World League Superior Justice beyond your power to touch."

"Mmm." Devaux seemed unperturbed. "On what evidence? I have been quite careful not to involve myself in this affair. Even your own workmen will admit I had nothing to do with what has happened."

"Hanssen's testimony will be quite sufficient. If you don't think he'll testify against his father-in-law, just look at him!"

They regarded the Swede, who was sitting up dazedly in the mud, listening to the conversation. He flinched at Buckmaster's mere glance.

Devaux had never seen a more thoroughly whipped man. He smiled coldly and nodded. Having accepted the obvious truth, his agile brain raced far ahead.

"Yes, I see your point. He's not my servant any more. He's yours. So it's a stalemate. We each, in a sense, defeat the other. In which case I have a proposition to make."

"Make it."

"A truce. My intention, of course, was to finance a new corporation under my own name to buy in the incompleting project and recoup, many fold, on the past year's investment. I'll still do so, but with you retaining your fifty per cent. Just as we started, co-owners. In exchange, you forget the criminal charges. That way, we both come out ahead. Any other way, we both lose. I think you must agree that's a reasonable offer."

"Very. But it's based on one rather shaky premise. You think I'm stopped here. But I'm not."

Devaux's disdainful eyebrows began to rise. "You believe you can repair those pits in two weeks? I'm disappointed in you, Mr. Buckmaster. That is rank nonsense."

"I've no intention of repairing the pits now. I have no need of them, never did need them. They were dug so as to lull any sus-

picious you might have entertained about the authenticity of my so-called vortex-ring machinery. That was strictly romance on my part. The most powerful vortex rings in the System couldn't begin to clear away the four-mile thickness of clouds on this planet. I tricked you, Devaux, with an elaborate pretense about the importance of the vortex-ring installation, so that when you and Hanssen struck, it would be at the pits."

Devaux took a step back, and something changed in his face as this depth bomb went off within him. A murmur of wonderment ran round the circle of listeners.

"But—what about the fog," the financier said. "You've got to clear it somehow."

"Sure. Another Carle-Buckmaster invention. Gigantic X-rays, not quite X-rays as you know them, perhaps. Six huge machines. When those super-rays are turned upon the mists, the moisture will be condensed and precipitated out to the extent of the penetration, which will be well beyond the cloud limit. Thus, a hole to the sunlight—just as simple as that."

"Then—this vortex ring business, and the pits—all a colossal bluff?"

"Precisely. Oh, I'll want the pits eventually as housings for the ray projectors, but they're not immediately necessary. We can set up on the open ground for the present."

Devaux's armor cracked a bit. "With my own money you cheat me!" he shouted.

"That was my money!"

Buckmaster grinned, for the first time in many days. "Yeah. Ironic, isn't it?"

Devaux snarled, animal-fashion. "You haven't succeeded yet. There's no opening in the mist. You haven't made the beam-car trial run, and until you do you've failed to meet the government's specifications."

"Tut, tut, Devaux, don't be impatient. All in due time." Buckmaster looked up at the crowd, raised his voice. "You men! Back on the job! Never mind the last few yards that were to have been added to the tower. I want the beam receiver installed up there as is. Tomorrow morning I'm calling Mt. Apollo to shoot the beam down. Now get busy."

**T**HE workers dispersed without a word, streaming back to their jobs. Buckmaster called unit C on the handy-talky, explained the situation briefly to a trusted subordinate, reassured him. Then he looked at Hanssen.

"You! Take my Hartz-Cunningham and go

back to Carle's lab. Get the X-ray projectors. Bring them here at once."

Someone put a protesting hand on Buckmaster's arm. It was Belle Courtney, with her heart shining in her eyes.

"John, you've done wonderfully well," she said. "Please be careful. Don't make any mistakes at this stage."

"There's no need to worry about trusting Hanssen. He'll do exactly as I tell him. Won't you, Hanssen?" He handled the fellow with his eyes.

Hanssen wiped his face. "Yes, sir," he replied, and walked off as if hypnotized, without a look at his father-in-law.

"As for you, Belle, you can do me a favor. Detail some loyal men to make sure that our distinguished guest here doesn't try to sneak off in that space yacht of his. Then give me a place to rest and don't wake me till dawn. I've got to sleep."

"Yes, John." Belle fell into step as Buckmaster headed for Honky-tonk-on-Jets. As they parted before the door of a room which was being prepared for him with cot and blankets, she opened her mouth to speak, then changed her mind. Instead, she cuffed him man-fashion across the bicep.

"You know, John, you're pretty terrific. In a colossal sort of way."

Buckmaster smiled at her. "Glad you think so, Belle." . . .

Daybreak appeared, and with it came the cessation of the night's labors. Exhausted, the men flung themselves down on packing crates or tool chests or even in the mud for precious rest. But if his life had depended on it, not a man there could have forced himself to leave that magic hilltop on the day of all days.

The last week, with its alarms and excitements, piling climax upon climax, had built up a tremendous feeling of tension. Just to breathe was to feel the tingling tightness that gripped everyone in its spell. Now the drama was being played out to its last act, with even the struggle between Titans being capped as John Buckmaster hurled his strength and his mind against the insensate powers of nature.

The workers had set the stage with a final burst of pre-dawn energy. Now they lay back to watch history in the making.

Buckmaster, bathed and breakfasted and refreshed, stepped from Honky-tonk-on-Jets and took in the scene. Ichabod Devaux stood quietly some distance away, stiff as a ramrod, almost as if he had not moved

throughout the night. Hanssen, too was nearby. He shambled up to Buckmaster like a faithful dog not quite sure whether he'll get a bone or a kick from his master.

"I—I followed your orders, sir. The X-ray stuff is all here. Also the big cable. In your ship."

"Good. Set the six machines up in a circle roughly corresponding to the circle of pits. Then send someone up on the hydraulic to attach the heavy cable to the receiver."

"Right." Hanssen began to call orders, and operations proceeded smoothly. Three men piled onto the lift and fastened one end of the seemingly endless black cable to the platform, then shot up into the murk alongside the tower. Snake-like the cable uncoiled in pursuit.

A small stream of men wrestled the ray projectors into position so that their rays would describe a perfect, straight-walled cylinder through the fog, aimed at the mathematically calculated position of the sun. From a distance they resembled a battery of tremendous searchlights. But when one peered inside, their close resemblance to the conventional X-ray—on a huge scale—was unmistakable.

Another hour passed while cable connections were made, final adjustments checked. Then Buckmaster, estimating that the sun had risen sufficiently high, turned to Devaux.

"Well, we're about ready to move into action," said Buckmaster. "We'll know the answers to a lot of questions pretty soon. Maybe good, maybe bad. Exciting, isn't it?" They smiled at each other without mirth.

Buckmaster called Mt. Apollo on the handy-talky, dictated revised figures on the height of the tower, and told them to switch on the power beam as soon as possible. Apollo replied that the weather was clear, had been so all morning, atop the mountain, and that all was ready for the final test.

**M**INUTES loaded with suspense followed. Then the beam came hissing invisibly through the mists to register a perfect bull's-eye, on the receiver. The contact was made with a crash that shivered the metal spire to its foundations, and a blinding blob of pure energy splattered like fireworks out of the clouds, fell smoking and sizzling into the mud.

"Power," observed Buckmaster. "Sheer power. In quantities almost beyond the ability of the ordinary mind to grasp."

Quickly now the tempo increased, as Buckmaster briefly tested each projector. All was well. After clearing the mighty circle of all persons, he closed the master switch.

Silently, the weapons of Man's ingenuity thrust their unseen challenge against the hitherto immutable and unconquerable shape of Nature itself. At first there was no change. Then, ever so faintly, a drizzle began to drift casually down.

The drizzle thickened to a light rainfall, and quite suddenly the clouds recoiled, as if a living thing had felt the thrust of a knife. They swirled sluggishly, seeking to repel or evade the force that disintegrated them. In vain. Harder came the rain, pattering steadily, and the form of a tube-shaped opening began to come uncannily into being. Up and up rose the circular aperture, till the entire tower stood completely revealed. Still further the fog retreated under the unceasing hammering of the rays.

The planet fought back with primitive savagery, marshaling its powers to smash contemptuously at Man's puny science which dared offer challenge to its supremacy. A torrent of water began to pour from the cleared-out cylinder in the mist. Ditches had been designed to drain off this rain-water, but they quickly filled and began to overflow their banks. The torrent became a flood, scattering the workers like flushed quail, chasing them to shelter in Honky-tonk-on-Jets or the barracks or in tall trees, whence they watched the progress of the battle.

The water rose to such heights that it threatened to inundate the projectors. One of them actually did short out with a sharp splutter and a wisp of smoke, and the others were saved only after a bitter skirmish with sandbags and shovels. Lightning crackled with stunning violence, adding new hazard to the tumult, striking at the tower repeatedly with such fury that it shivered and changed color and gave off an eerie discharge.

But amid everything John Buckmaster flourished through flood and storm checking and adjusting his apparatus, waging his war with the unimpassioned relentlessness of Juggernaut. Ever and ever upward he thrust his invisible piston against the unwilling vapors.

The end came, after hours of strife, with startling suddenness. One moment all the world seemed dissolved in storm and thun-

der and the rush of waters. The next, the last wisp of cloud four miles up had dissolved, and a shaft of blinding sunlight poured down the vertical tunnel to bite searingly into the sodden earth.

Instantaneously a great cloud of vapor blossomed upward, only to be quickly changed into steam by the rays. A wave of well-night unendurable heat blasted out for a short distance, forcing even Buckmaster away from the hill. More steam arose, in progressively lesser puffs, to be dispersed, and in an amazingly short period all the ground within reach of the sun's fierce light was baked hard and dry.

Slowly, by twos and threes, like bemused night creatures drawn irresistibly to the mighty blazing sword of sunlight which stabbed into the virgin soil to cleanse and sterilize its rottenness, the workmen gathered round. They stared upward into that unbelievable tube of brilliance. Its western arc, as the clockwork device to which each projector was attached pushed it imperceptibly along the sun's path, dripped like a leaky pipe. Once a momentary breeze stirred the mists and a brief shower of golden rain pattered down.

Slowly realization of the mighty truth dawned upon them. For the first time since the beginning of Creation itself, the light of the sun was touching the surface of Venus. The dynamic vision of one man alone was responsible.

A cabaret girl, her body in silhouette, stood shielding her eyes from the brilliance.

"By the seven stars," she said in awed tones. "He's really done it;"

A ragged cheer went up, reluctant at first, then suddenly full-throated and sincere—a mighty shout of triumph. The men rushed to where the battered and mud-stained Buckmaster stood waiting and hoisted him to their shoulders. A wild victory march ensued, clear around the circle of ray projectors, laughing yelling, clumsily dancing in the mud with Belle Courtney and her cabaret girls, improvising verses for the ribald tune that was to immortalize this moment in song. It was a reaction of sheer joy to the violence of the night before.

**S**PENT, the celebrants finally released the grinning Buckmaster at the entrance of Honky-tonk-on-Jets. Ichabod Devaux awaited him there.

"Well, partner, I'm afraid this is where our trails divide." Buckmaster drew out his

wallet, extracted a much-creased sheet of paper. "This is a little mussy, but after all I've been carrying it around almost a year. It's quite legal—a transferral of all right and title to your share in Sun-Beam, Inc. Or, rather, your control of the dummy holding company whose officers—your pals—have been technically my partners. All it requires is your signature. And oh, yes. Don't console yourself with the thought that I'm in any financial hole. A successful demonstration will bring bankers fighting for the privilege to invest."

Devaux looked around almost sightlessly. "You—you haven't yet made a trial run of the beam-car."

Buckmaster grimaced. "I'm disappointed in you. Twenty-four hours will see the thermocouples in place and the relayed beam shooting to unit C. The armature can be fastened to any old rocket ship, ready to go through the trial run as soon as the government inspector gets here. And he's on his way now. You can't hope for any slip-up there. It's just a formality."

Devaux passed a hand trembling over his face, and his voice was halting, uncertain. "Yes, yes, of course," he said. "A formality. That's true."

"Perhaps the situation is not quite clear. You have two alternatives—sign over the company or go to prison for what would probably be the rest of your life."

Devaux rallied himself then, with a faint trace of his old acerbity. "There is no need, young man, to explain fundamentals to me. I can take a licking like a man. I know when to concede a six-inch putt. Give me that paper."

Spreading the document on his knee, Ichabod Devaux scrawled his signature thereon, returned it to Buckmaster. Then he turned and walked slowly toward his ship. His clothes were shapeless, sagging, as if something inside the man had been broken.

John Buckmaster wasted no pity on that grasping old man. Devaux had his freedom and most of his wealth—a good bargain. Venus under his domination would have groaned and withered under an economic tyranny. It was good that he was now out of the picture.

Instead, Buckmaster looked musingly at that history-making paper for a long time. He thought about Fred Carle, who was not there to share in the triumph he had helped so greatly to achieve. He thought of Belle

Courtney, handsome, loyal, a staunch partner for any man. Then he thrust these thoughts reluctantly but firmly aside.

There is neither time nor room for sentiment when a man is overlord of an entire world, and the blood of empire courses his veins.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Other Worlds to Conquer*

John was a man driven by his belief that the world was a savage thing to be fought and conquered, and that his mission in life was to lead that battle. His nature was defiant—a man born to resist and be alone. Yet this quality which made him great crowded all gentleness out of him and made impossible the deep friendships a man needs. He could have had the devotion of any number of women—yes, including mine—but it was not in him to share.

He aged rapidly those last few years. The joy of battle was gone, and his horizons closed slowly down. For all that he was a millionaire many times over, benevolent master of a planet and over a million human beings, he was really nothing more than a lonely old man. . . .

*Unpublished Diary—Belle Courtney.*

**W**ERE this fiction, the story of John Buckmaster could end now, with him retiring to live happily ever after. But life seldom comes to so neatly dramatic a period.

Instead, Buckmaster went on to complete the project and made all of his dreams come true. Mines, industries, plantations sprang into being along the transcontinental pattern of the beam-line. Small cities, completely enclosed in a special glass which filtered out the harmfulness of the sunlight, blossomed near each relay tower. Surrounded by batteries of improved X-ray projectors, residents saw the thick heavens above them open and close morning and night like so many colossal, weeping eyes. Health and prosperity and law and happiness were the gifts of Sun-Beam, Inc. to the colonists.

Buckmaster himself achieved what few men ever experienced—saw his name honored within his own lifetime. The sculptor Maevsky cast a gigantic bronze statue of Buckmaster in a symbolic resemblance to Prometheus bringing the sun's fire to Venus, and the original was fittingly erected upon the topmost point of Mt. Apollo.

Buckmaster also was the focus of a literary tempest, set off when some young self-



styled historian debunked him completely as a cruel robber baron and a despot. Others rushed to his defense, hailing him as the greatest of all pioneers. He was either beloved or hated—there was no middle ground. He even became the object of a senatorial investigation.

But amid all of the furor Buckmaster remained unmoved. He had indeed come upon the winter of his discontent. After a time the excitement of managing his empire of marvels palled. He was no glorified book-keeper to sit in a sumptuous counting-house calculating his fabulous income. He was born for action, to fight.

Then one day John Buckmaster vanished. It was just that simple. He went to bed

however, made no progress till they were on the verge of tearing apart Venus' cities one by one in a search for kidnapers or murderers. This announcement on the telefilm brought a message from Belle Courtney, an invitation to come to her place and learn the truth about Buckmaster's disappearance.

Eyebrows raised at this. Bell Courtney was almost as legendary and revered a figure as John Buckmaster. She still ran a night club—the most exotic and luxurious on the planet—and it was still known as Belle's. A bit more refined, quite a bit more expensive, Belle still dealt in the three G's of the entertainment world—girl shows, gambling, and good liquor.



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one night as usual, and the next morning his servants found he was gone. There was no farewell note, no signs of struggle, no clue to an utter mystery.

The disappearance created a terrific sensation on both Venus and Earth. The ether burned with news stories and official communications. High authorities dashed about like rabbits.

When he felt restless, police learned that Buckmaster often left home at night for hours at a time, without saying where he was going. The dates of these journeys were noted. Then someone reported that the famous old Hartz-Cunningham, long ago retired as obsolescent, had vanished from the annex to the Pioneer Days Museum where it had been enshrined. Finally, a smart reporter recalled that at irregular intervals, in Buckmaster's home city, the ray projectors had been turned on at night for no discernible reason, and these nights coincided with those of Buckmaster's roamings.

An astronomer might have added these things up into the right answer. Officialdom,

The Venusian High Commissioner himself headed the party that answered that invitation. Belle Courtney, white-haired and queenly, met them in her office and came quickly to the point.

"Gentlemen, I would have spoken sooner except for a promise to John not to say anything until he had time to pass Earth's orbit."

"Earth's orbit!" said an investigator. "You mean he's left Venus?"

Babble broke out as comprehension dawned. "Not in that old wreck of a Hartz-Cunningham, surely!" protested another.

"But why past the Earth? Where else can he go?"

"I can't understand the reason for making such a mystery of it."

**B**ELLE COURTNEY waited for the clamor to die away. "John wanted to take this trip alone. He knew that if he announced his intention beforehand, or let anyone know of his whereabouts before he got beyond all possibility of interception,

nosey officialdom would kick up a fuss and try to stop him. Those were his words. It's difficult for a man as important as he is to drop everything and leave. The only way to do it is quietly, secretly."

"But where's he going?" asked the High Commissioner.

"I'll show you, gentlemen." Belle pressed a button that slid aside the ceiling to reveal only the glass dome of the city above. It was raining lightly. "John left me authority to request the projectors turned at my pleasure. The mist should be cleared shortly. You see, this is where John came on those nights when he couldn't stand the boredom of his home. He spent those nights

right here, in my office."

The High Commissioner turned pink, and he coughed delicately. "Were you and Mr. Buckmaster—ah—"

The woman smiled. "No. To my everlasting regret, no. John had a far greater love than that. He was too big a man for one woman to hold. This is what he wanted." She pointed upward. "He sat for hours here just looking at what you see there, yearningly."

The tunnel through the clouds was complete, and four tiny stars twinkled miraculously. One of them was ever so faintly reddish in color.

It was the planet Mars.

THE MOST UNUSUAL FANTASY IN YEARS!

## DEVILS FROM DARKONIA

By

JERRY SHELTON

NEXT ISSUE'S FEATURED COMPLETE NOVEL

**Tough whiskers take the count... and fast...  
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The giant robot struck at the huge creature savagely

# CASTAWAYS IN TWO DIMENSIONS

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG

*A Space-Traveling Couple Encounter Robot Trouble on an Asteroid Where Automatons Rule and Men Are Slaves!*

**K**NOBBY stared down through the green twilight with his thoughts in a turmoil.

"As I live!" he breathed. "A manlike automaton!"

Being a high-strung, W-type robot, Knobby hated to be alone with his thoughts. Solitude chilled him, and bleak, somber vistas

never failed to cast a disheartening pall on his spirits.

But that didn't mean he had any intention of eating crow. He had climbed up between the iron crags of the rough-surfaced little asteroid in a towering rage, and now—he just didn't care what happened to him. A small, luminous fire cloud bumped lightly

against Knobby, and whirled away. He just didn't care whether he lived or died.

He didn't like solitude, didn't like the feel of it. But even the ghastly loneliness of the void was better than the wrong kind of company. Robots could put their heads together and get somewhere. But when humans put their heads together—

It filled him with a cold fury just to think about it. Gates and "that woman," putting their wet mouths together and getting precisely nowhere. Smacking noises they were making, with the space-ship a charred wreck behind them, and their chances of staying alive getting slimmer by the minute.

The fire cloud returned, and encircled Knobby's head. Humans would shun a robot if he pressed his nose against another robot's flat face, and choked on the fumes seeping out. Not, of course, that it was any metal off Knobby's nose. A robot could be slowed up by cold, but not killed by it. A robot didn't have to worry about starving to death either.

On a bleak little world in the asteroid belt a W-type robot was really in his element. A few short strides could carry a robot's short hull up hill and down dale with a minimum of effort.

"Light as air thou art, blithe spirit!" Knobby intoned, and flapped his arms in the twilight. Up hill and down dale, as blithely as a penguin.

He wasn't kidding himself—not for an instant. There was nothing blithe about the way he felt, and he certainly was not a penguin. Neither was the enormous, verdigris-green robot that layed sprawled directly in Knobby's path.

Knobby was squatting on a sloping rock formation in the middle of the iron-walled gully, his stalked eyes slanting downward, the wheels and cogs inside his pear-shaped hull keeping up their pleasant continuous whirring.

He had the aspect of a robot who has lived for years with the dread expectation of meeting just such a monstrosity. An utterly different kind of automaton—a mechanical figure so angular and immense that it failed to evoke in Knobby the slightest feeling of kinship.

Its head was square, not knobular like Knobby's, and its limbs were so massive that Knobby was a little afraid to move any closer even though the possibility of anything happening to him seemed remote. He found himself wondering just how long the great figure had lain sprawled out at the mouth of the gully.

**A** YEAR, Earth time? Ten thousand years? How long would it take a robot seven feet tall to pick up all that blue-green rust?

Knobby was timid, but he was not a coward. Cautiously he moved down from the flat black rock he had been squatting on, and encircled the great figure.

In places the green twilight had a congealed aspect. In places a colder light slanted down between the iron crags, swirling along the gully till Knobby felt pierced by it. The fire cloud swirled back, and bumped against Knobby's chest.

"Besides," Knobby thought aloud, "an automaton that huge shouldn't be able to move very fast." The wheels in Knobby's chest were spinning faster. "Go on, touch it. Waddaya afraid of?"

For an instant Knobby's segmented hand hung poised in mid-air directly above the sprawling automaton's enormous back. Then, still cautiously, he did what he had wanted to do all along.

"Tap—tap—tap—tap," went his fingers. The experimental urge was strong in Knobby. Up and down the robot's chest his fingers moved, drummingly. "Tap—tap—THUMP."

"Oh, golly, I didn't mean—"

The gigantic automaton opened its eyes, and looked at Knobby.

In utter consternation Knobby stared back, his stalked eyes quivering.

Something made a swishing sound in the air directly above Knobby's head, and a twelve-inch metal hand descended on Knobby's shoulder. Knobby found he couldn't move.

He could yell though. He did, throwing back his head, and straining his vocal apparatus to the bursting point.

"Gates! Gates! Oh, Gates! Oh, Gates!"

The great robot got lumberingly to its feet, pulling the little robot toward it.

"GATES!"

Dan Gates sat on an iron outcropping with his hands on his knees, and stared at his bride of two weeks moving about in the twilight, her hair a golden blur against the charred and half-telescoped wreck of the "Queen of the Spaceways."

The "Queen of the Spaceways" wasn't regal any more. Smoke was still arising from her fire-gutted gravity ports, and her denuded vertical sections stood out in the green twilight like markers in a cemetery.

Gates' shoulders jerked. If only he could stop reproaching himself, stop remembering. You could trust a W-type robot just as far

as you could throw a mountain, assuming, of course, that you could lift a mountain. At least, he consoled himself, he couldn't have known Knobby would rip apart an entire section of the control board.

He had left Knobby alone in the control room only six or seven minutes. He had put Knobby on his honor, hadn't he?

The experimental urge? Was it something that had been left out of robots that made them want to take things apart?

Knobby. Knobby sitting before the control board, and turning with the innocent look of a robot caught in the act of dismantling its own grandfather. Actually Knobby had committed a much blacker crime. He had made such a ghastly mess of the panel that a sudden, overmastering urge to commit robotcide had prevented Gates from saving the ship.

The crash had prevented Gates from committing robotcide.

Gates looked down at his hands. It was curious, but he no longer had any desire to take Knobby apart. Anger was different on different worlds. On a little world in the asteroid belt resolutions wavered, thinned out. Perhaps the light gravity had something to do with it.

Gates was a tall, powerfully built man, and usually he had the tight, resolute look that went with great strength. Now, however, a strange, inexplicable uneasiness was surging through him. His aspect was not unlike that of a scrubby-headed little boy who has abandoned a younger brother in a tough neighborhood without giving him a word of advice.

Gates flung a look at his wife and slapped his knees to attract her attention.

"Joan, where do you suppose Knobby's gone?"

Joan Gates was a tall, willowy girl with features that were serious and pretty. At the sound of her husband's voice she turned abruptly, her lips tightening.

"Does it matter?"

"I can't help worrying a little," Dan Gates replied. "He went off in such a terrible huff. He might slip, and injure himself."

"Wouldn't that be too bad!"

"He might get lost, Joan."

Joan laughed harshly. "On an asteroid this size? If he just keeps on walking we'll be seeing him again too fast for my peace of mind."

"A moment ago I thought I heard someone shouting. Perhaps I'd better just take a look around."

"Go ahead—get lost yourself. See if I

care? See if I come looking?"

Gates breathed hard. "You seemed to care, just a moment ago. That's why Knobby went off the handle. He doesn't like to hear humans making osculatory noises."

"Neither do I," Joan flung back. "But I had to kiss you to get rid of him."

"Oh? Okay, then. I thought that kiss tasted a little fishy."

**W**ITHOUT giving himself time to regret the retort, Gates leaped to his feet, and strode angrily off in the direction the robot had taken, his heavy boots crunching on the harsh, metallic soil which covered the solid iron surface of the little asteroid to a depth of three inches.

The emerald twilight had hardly swallowed him when Joan flushed scarlet, muttered something which would have shocked her grandmother, and went stamping off in the opposite direction.

An hour and a half later two frightened humans were confronting each other on the opposite side of the asteroid.

"Dan, I've searched everywhere!"

"Yeah, so have I."

"He's just gone, Dan. He isn't anywhere."

Joan sat down on a boulder, and cradled her head in her arms.

"Danny, if we should ever lose him—"

"How could we lose him on an asteroid two miles in diameter," Gates muttered, striving to keep despair out of his voice. "Maybe we just didn't look in the right places. Long vegetation would conceal him."

"I didn't see any vegetation," Joan moaned. "Not a sprig!"

Gates made a despairing gesture. "I was hoping they'd be some on your side. There wasn't on mine."

"Dan," came Joan's despairing whisper, "could he have fallen off the asteroid?"

Gates stood still, his brow furrowed. "Impossible! Didn't we just walk around from the other side to this side? This is a massive asteroid. You can't fall off a massive spherical asteroid. You could fall off a massive flat asteroid because the gravity tug wouldn't be the same in all directions. But you wouldn't get far."

"But Knobby's heavier than we are," Joan reminded him.

"He couldn't fall off if he weighed a ton. What did I say when I checked up on the gravity?"

"A word beginning with a 'd'. Deuterium?"

"Well, there's your answer. That's why he couldn't have fallen off. Iron asteroids have an affinity for heavy isotopes, and just a

thimbleful of deuterium pocketed somewhere near the core would explain why we weigh almost as much here as we would on Terra. It would also explain why the oxygen hasn't flown off into space. You'll notice there's no animal life. Even asteroid hoppers couldn't get on and off this one."

"If he bent down and took a tremendous leap?" Joan suggested.

Gates shook his head. "No. He wouldn't do that anyway. He's too much of a moral coward."

"There's no telling what he might do if he thought he wasn't wanted," Joan said. "I wish we hadn't spoken so sharply to him. What if kissing does grate on him? It grates on Eskimos, it . . . Dan, you're not listening!"

He had turned, and was staring at something he hadn't noticed before—a luminous, pale pulsing which didn't hang in the air like a fire cloud, but seemed fastened to the surface of the asteroid by writhing tendrils of mist. It looked not unlike a ghostly portal, rising to a height of about ten feet and forming a distinct arch against the weathered rock formations on the opposite side of the gully.

A portal? But of course that was absurd. Fireclouds were a common enough asteroidal phenomena. What if one did descend to the ground instead of hanging suspended in mid-air like a haunted will-o'-the-wisp? On a heavy-corded asteroid you had to expect unusual meteorological phenomena. Fire clouds were dense, so naturally the wall of the gully wouldn't be visible through one.

"Dan, do you know what that reminds me of? A door!"

So Joan had seen it too, and jumped to the same out-of-bounds conclusion.

"Nonsense," Gates said. "That's just fire cloud. They come in all shapes and sizes. There's a little one right behind you—it's been following you like the poodle dog that made Alice wonder."

"It doesn't look like a fire cloud to me, Dan. It's far too luminous."

"Well, what's to stop us from making a close-up inspection?" Gates asked.

Joan rose, and ran her hand across her brow.

"Yes, I—I think we'd better."

Crossing the gully at her husband's side, Joan felt her feet begin to drag.

It wasn't a fire cloud. They could see it wasn't directly they were within ten feet of it.

"Dan!" Joan spoke in a hushed whisper. "Do you suppose it opens out into some-

where?" She continued staring at it.

"What kind of talk is that?"

"I don't know. It makes me dizzy, just to look at it."

"That's because the pulsing comes and goes," her husband told her. "It's a little like looking at a revolving hypnotic disk. Just look away for a minute, and you won't feel dizzy."

Joan nodded, and looked away up the gully.

**F**OR an instant there was silence, and then—she heard a clumping sound. It didn't seem important somehow. Her husband wore heavy boots and he was undoubtedly walking up and down in front of the glimmering, craning his neck like a turkey surveying the chopping block on a bright frosty morning in November.

What extraordinary thoughts popped into her head! A gifted and imaginative girl she was. Gifted enough to write a travel book, or even a best selling novel. All about the wonders of the asteroid belt, and the joy of sharing adventures in far places with a man who was huge and bronzed and joyful, a great careless fool of an adventurer who was famous among spacemen as a writer, mining engineer, and astragator when he wasn't playing nursemaid to a little W-type robot.

She blinked and swung about to put her arms around her husband's shoulders, and hold him as tightly as she had done when Knobby had gone clumping off into the twilight in a towering rage.

He wasn't there to hold.

He wasn't—anywhere. -

She stood for an instant staring into the pulsing, her hands pressed to her temples.

In the instant that she had looked away, her husband had been seized by the giant robot!

Gates fought with all his strength to free himself from the merciless grip of the robot. The towering automaton had come through the pulsing so suddenly that Gates had been stricken speechless. Now its metal arms had gone about him, and it was lifting him.

He tried to scream, to warn Joan, but the automaton had such a tight grip on his windpipe he couldn't make a sound. In that moment of crisis and horror his gaze seemed for an instant to sweep the whole asteroid—the purple-black crags receding into green distances, the narrow gully down which he had stridden to meet Joan coming back, the motionless green of the heavens.

Then the heavens were spinning, wheeling,



and the pulsing was all about him, and metal fingers were biting into his flesh.

The robot was gigantic, a seven-foot automaton with an enormous gleaming body-box, and a head that seemed to violate all the laws of centrifugal force, so furiously was it revolving.

It is doubtful if a man had ever changed worlds faster than Gates. One moment he was gazing at the receding iron cliffs of the asteroid, the next with a walled-back stare out over a green and peaceful world of rolling downs and little circular lakes that stretched out serenely to far purple distances.

Gates saw the new world for an instant from the automaton's jogging shoulders, and then from a lower vantage point. Just inside the pulsing the metal giant swung about, and Gates could feel himself slipping. The final indignity came when the great figure shook itself so violently that Gates slipped completely off its smooth hull to land with a thud on the base of his spine.

He did not see the robot turn and stride back into the pulsing. But when he struggled to a sitting position the towering automaton was nowhere in sight, and only the murmur of gentle winds broke the stillness.

Gates' temples were pounding, his lungs felt constricted. Looking down, he saw that he was sitting on an overhanging river bank above a swiftly whirling current. Soft grass cushioned his seat, and twenty feet beneath his dangling legs there swirled the bluest water he had ever seen.

He knew, of course, that it couldn't have happened! It wasn't real, it was pure nightmare. How could he have passed through a flame-cloudlike pulsing from a bleak-cragged asteroid to—the English lake country!

After a moment he became less sure. The earth was firm beneath his hand, and the wind was drying the sweat which had oozed out on his forehead. He could smell the running water. No, it was even more definite than that. He could feel the presence of the water. It stirred a peculiar excitement in him, as did all swiftly moving currents. It did something to his nerves which, even more than the firmness of the earth, convinced him suddenly that it had happened.

After a moment the roaring in Gates' ears subsided, and he saw that the great automaton had returned, and was easing someone down into the soft grass at his side.

He drew a harsh, tight breath. "Joan!" he groaned.

Joan's lips opened, but no words came out. No sound even. She sat perfectly still with her hands on her knees, her eyes fastened in stunned horror on her husband's white face.

"I'm sorry this had to happen, Danny," a familiar voice said.

Gates turned his head cautiously, as though fearful it would bounce from his shoulders, and go rolling down the sloping bank into the river.

Knobby was sitting a little higher up on the bank, with his segmented limbs drawn up grasshopper fashion on both sides of his faintly luminous hull.

"Really sorry, Danny!"

"Knobby!"

"I couldn't have prevented it, Danny. He's never seen a human before and he's curious to find out what makes you tick."

**T**HE towering automaton stood still staring down at Dan Gates and Joan. His legs were spindly, so thin they seemed to bend a little beneath the weight of his massive hull. He wasn't luminous and translucent like Knobby. In fact, he was covered with the blue-green rust of copper from his segmented toes to his flat summit. But though the opacity of his hull concealed his inner coils there was a row of projecting knobs high up on his chest, and little wheels were going around and around on both sides of his conical neck.

"An ugly-looking brute, isn't he?" Knobby said, almost apologetically. "He doesn't understand me when I speak English, but our brains are keyed to the same positronic pitch. I can tune in on his thoughts and he can tune in on mine. Not when I don't want him to, of course."

A sick, raw horror pawed at Gates' nerves. The huge robot had a perfectly square face. His eyes were not extensible, but flat, dully gleaming disks surmounting a triangular valve which looked enough like a nose to . . . Ugh!

"Where are we, Knobby?" Dan Gates choked. "Do you know?"

"We're in an Ul-dimension," Knobby said.

"An Ul-dimension!"

"That's right, Danny. It's a different kind of space. It exists right alongside of our space, but it sort of travels around. It's smaller than our space—much smaller. Olulu says there isn't anything at all beyond those hills over there. Everything begins here, and ends over there."

"Olulu?" Gates choked.

"Big fellow here. He isn't a robot in a

strict sense. He was born mechanically."

"Born mechanically?"

Knobby elevated his stalked eyes. "So he says. Humans are born naturally, and ordinary robots are assembled, put together. A shameful thing."

Knobby was halted by a grinding interruption from Olulu. The metal giant had bent, and was pressing its square head-box against Knobby's knobular one. There was a low, vibrant whirring.

Joan was sitting up straight, her hands pressed to her temples.

"Dan—Dannikins, darling, we're mad! We're drooling somewhere in straitjackets. We just think we're here!"

"Don't I know it?" Gates groaned.

"Y'wanna know what he says?" Knobby asked.

Gates knew that Knobby only slurred his syllables when he could scarcely contain himself. His apprehension moved up a notch. Grabbing hold of his knees he pivoted about on the bank and faced the little robot.

"Yes, I want to know. You're going to spill it all at once, and spill it fast. Not just what he said now. Everything—how you got here, just what an Ul-dimension is. Go on—condense it!"

"And if I don't?" Knobby asked.

"Knobby, are you going to be stubborn, the way you were in the pilot chamber?" Dan Gates' lips were twitching. "Do you know what I almost did to you when you tore apart the controls?"

Knobby's eyes began to twitch. "I can imagine."

"Then imagine this. You've been taken apart, and are lying here rusting. Your coils are scattered all over the landscape. Your big friend here walks up and down going 'Tsk! Tsk! Tsk!' Maybe I'm still here, too. Maybe there's a skeleton right here by the river bank."

"Stop trying to spare me," Joan said hoarsely. "Two skeletons."

"All right, two skeletons. Darling, I'll make it up to you if we ever get out of here alive. Two skeletons and the blue-green intestinal fortitude of a 'W'-type robot that wouldn't talk."

"Did I say I wouldn't talk?" Knobby crawled, a thin film of lubricant seepage oozing out on his bumpy brow. "Did I say I wouldn't?"

"You implied as much," Gates rapped.

"Aw, I was just pulling your leg, Danny."

"You picked a fine time to clown around!"

"I'm sorry, Danny. I'll give it to you in one sentence—the kind I'm good at. This is

it: Ul-dimension travels around like a soap bubble inside our Universe and now it's resting on the asteroid, and . . . Out through a rent in it came Olulu a million years ago to explore our world, but instead the cold congealed his lubrication valves and he lay sprawled in the gully until I, Knobby, found and thumped him."

Knobby stopped, and looked up at Olulu with a triangular something in his stare which completely baffled Gates. He knew from experience that a robot's facial expression could express emotional nuances which humans had no words for, and, often enough, no patience with. But usually they were just that—nuances. Now the little robot seemed to be looking at the big robot in a completely nonhuman way.

"Go on," Gates prodded.

Knobby seemed to take a deep breath. "Olulu is tremendously grateful to me. Olulu says that our world is governed by the laws of cause and effect. But here everything happens because something else hasn't. Olulu was born mechanically because nobody existed before him to cause him to be born in any other way."

Gates knew then that Knobby was lying. But all he said was: "Well, that certainly explains everything. Is Olulu all alone here?"

"He's the only manlike automaton here,"

Knobby replied. "There are other—"

CRUNCH.

**S**OMETHING flashed downward across Gates' face, and struck him a resounding blow in the stomach. As he went plunging backward he saw with sick horror that two enormous metal jaws had pounded shut with a glistening seepage of black grease a yard from his foot. Attached to the jaws was a long, segmented metal body terminating in a furiously thrashing metal tail.

Having saved Gates' foot with a savage blow to the solar plexus the giant robot turned, and flung itself with grating fury on a rearing shape of such formidable dimensions that it blotted out the rolling downs on the opposite side of the watercourse. The struggle which ensued was ghastly to watch. The giant literally took the crocodilelike robot apart with its bare hands.

The metal river monster had covered its advance upon Gates by skirting the overhanging bank, and now Joan was screaming because its lashing tail had hurled her twenty feet through the air into a clump of thistles ten feet in height.

Pale lavender the thistles were, but as Joan struggled to extricate herself they became red-tipped. Gates picked himself up and stumbled forward into the clump with his hands outthrust.

When he emerged he was supporting Joan, and his bare shoulders were crisscrossed with ugly crimson welts.

"Another thirty seconds, and you wouldn't have been able to sit," he muttered.

"I'm not badly scratched, but you are!" Joan cried, her eyes flaring wide. "Dan, those scratches are rising, they're turning into welts!"

"Poisonous vegetation." Gates grunted. "Probably those nettles were tipped with aconite."

Her moist palms found his cheeks. "Oh, Dannikins, I never thought you cared that much!"

"Break it up!" came in a petulant burst from the riverbank. "Here, of all places! Bussing! It's outrageous. What does it get you?"

Gates opened his hands. "Do they look strong enough to throttle him with, Joan?"

Joan made no reply. She was staring past Dan at the giant robot, her eyes wide with horror.

The towering automaton had so completely dismantled the crocodile that the river bank resembled a machine-shop nestling on the slope of a steadily erupting volcano.

Strewn in every direction on the sloping river bank was a hideous assortment of wheels, gears, buzz-saws, and long metal tubes that looked as though they'd done yeoman's service in an eel's stomach. Smoke was arising from some of the parts, and the long strip of metal which had formed the crocodile's back was enveloped in high-leaping flames.

The towering automaton stood silhouetted against the serene countryside beyond like a fiery Lucifer contemplating some sudden new assault on the sanity of humans, its arms folded on its chest.

"He saved my life!" Gates breathed. "I suppose I ought to feel grateful."

"I wouldn't, if I were you, Danny," came from Knobby.

Gates swung on him. "You—you didn't tell me what he said just now, when he buzzed you."

"I'm sorry, Danny. I meant to tell you. He asked me if—if robots had made humans."

Despite the grimness of his mood, Gates smiled. It was partly a smile of relief, partly of amusement.

"And what did you tell him?" he asked.

"I said we had."

Gates' jaw came unhinged. "What?"

"I lied to him, Danny. If I hadn't he would have despised me. He's the lord of all he surveys. He's great and powerful. He's won the struggle for survival against primitive automatons from the slime. You saw what he did to that crocodile automaton, a primitive thing."

"I saw what he did, yes." Gates' face was grim.

"He'd take me apart, too, Danny, if he thought I was just a machine! Oh, it's shameful to know you've been put together. You don't know what it's like, Danny. You've never experienced it."

"You seem to get along pretty well."

"You don't know what goes on inside me, Danny," the little robot complained. "There are times when—well, I've contemplated self-destruction."

"Really."

"Olulu respects me, but you never did. I'm just a gadget to you, Danny. Every time you look at me you think, 'I could take him apart with my bare hands.'"

Gates' breath caught sharply. "My watch is a gadget, but I wouldn't take it apart. It wouldn't be a crime, though, if that's what you mean."

Waving his segmented arms, Knobby turned to Joan.

"You see? He could murder me, and it wouldn't be a crime! You despise me too. If you didn't you wouldn't buss in my presence. You know how it grates on me."

**T**HE sympathy he expected was not forthcoming. Joan had been staring at the giant robot, but suddenly she swung about with dilating pupils. Her hands fastened on Knobby's shoulders.

"Just what did Olulu say when you told him robots made humans?" she demanded "Come on, talk! Tell me, or I'll shake you apart. Tell me, tell me!"

"He—he—said—said he was going go-going to t-take you apart. He wants to find out how you're made. I tried to talk him out of it, but—"

Joan stifled a scream.

"What's that?" Gates asked, his face darkening. "What did Knobby say?"

Joan told him.

Gates' face got so red Joan was a little afraid it would burst.

"Don't take him apart now," she pleaded. "Count ten first. Give him a few seconds to make his peace with the Satanic principle."

Then I'll help you if you like!"

Knobby didn't turn pale. A robot couldn't. But there were raucous grindings deep within his hull which left no doubt in Gates' mind that the segment he was unscrewing was the right one.

"Please, Danny, don't! Oh, don't, oh, don't. Please, Danny!"

A scream from Joan prevented Gates from dismantling the little robot's vocal apparatus.

"Dan, look at Olulu! His face—"

Gates gave Knobby a little push, sending him clanking backward. The robot's flat bottom hit the sod with a thud, and he sat for an instant as though stunned, his knobular head studded with little beads of lubricant seepage. Suddenly his hands were a weaving blur against his glowing hull.

"Hoarse—voice-box—he's maimed me!"

Gates' gaze was no longer on Knobby. He had swung about and was staring at Olulu, who was advancing with long, jogging strides.

There could be no doubt that the gigantic robot meant business. Its arms were swinging, it was coming in fast!

Just how fast Gates didn't realize till sharp metal talons raked his flesh, and a coldness smote his torso.

Gates hadn't heard his jerkin rip. He just saw the garment in the great robot's clasp as he leapt sideward with a hoarse cry.

The robot's mailed fist missed Gates' jouncing head by inches.

"Dan, Dan, watch out!"

Gates ducked low. Ignoring a sideling blow on the jaw from a pivoting metal knee he hastily scooped up a handful of dirt.

He flung the dirt full in Olulu's face.

The metal giant straightened, took a short step backward.

Spitting out a tooth, Dan Gates tore across the bank toward the dismantled river monster's smoking innards. He picked up a two-foot buzz-saw. As he hurled it at the robot he saw with an inward shrieking that Joan had stumbled, and was lying in a crumpled heap within reach of the great automaton's downsweeping talons.

Gates went berserk. The buzz-saw had gone sailing past the giant's head, but so terrible was his rage that he scored twice swiftly with fused lumps of metal that scorched his palms as he hurled them.

The robot had straightened, and was clawing at its face, as though the dirt particles had blinded it. As the heated missiles clanged against its chest it went staggering backward.

A hoarse whisper came out of Knobby.

"Danny, don't let him hurt her! Don't let him hurt her, Danny!"

"Don't worry—I won't!"

Gates had bent and picked up a heavy length of metal tubing.

He moved forward like an attacking panther, padding ahead on his soles with a terrible, cold fury.

A moment later the sound of metal being bashed in was almost like that of a magnetoriveter going full blast. Gates waited until the great robot was prostrate before he started ripping and tearing at the little metal knobs high up on the massive chest.

Five minutes later Knobby was pulling apart little antlike automatons two inches in length, and making wheezing noises deep in his throat. He had discovered the metal ants while searching around in the long grass with his flexible fingers. He had to do something to keep from cracking up, didn't he?

He was suddenly aware that Gates was standing beside him.

"Uh," Knobby said. "That gush of black grease welling up from his throat gave me a terrible turn, Danny. You took care of him, I guess."

"You don't have to guess," Gates rasped. "You know I did."

"No, I—I haven't looked. When I saw the grease it made me physically ill, Danny."

"Physically is good, coming from you. Why didn't you tell me there were humans here, Knobby?"

**K**NOBBY sat very still, his chest-wheels spinning wildly.

"You—you know?"

Gates nodded. "There's a small human footprint over there. A race of dwarfs, apparently."

"Yes, that's what Olulu said. They got smaller when they lost out in the struggle for survival."

Gates shuddered. "Knobby, could you—in one sentence? There's so much I'd like to know."

"You mean you want me to condense it? Glad to, Danny. This is an Ul-dimension just like Olulu said, but it isn't true there's no cause and effect here, because like in our world humans always come first, and—"

"I'm glad you realize that, Knobby," Gates rapped. "Now take a deep breath, and finish that sentence."

"This should interest you, Danny. The asteroid has a core of pure deuterium. That's what drew the Ul-dimension here. Ul-dimensions have an affinity for heavy isotopes."

"Finish that sentence, or I'll—"

"Humans made robots here too, but the struggle for survival kept making the robots larger and more diversified, and the humans smaller and more and more alike until—"

"Until, Knobby?"

"They became slaves, Danny. Olulu says—said—you see here little green-skinned dwarfs toiling beneath the lash against the quiet stars. It's sickening, Danny. Some of 'em wear wide metal neck bands so they can't even eat without permission."

There ensued a silence. Joan came up to stand beside her husband. Her face was strained.

"Do you think he's telling the truth, Dan?"

Gates nodded. "It wouldn't be to his advantage to lie now."

"No it wouldn't," Knobby agreed. "And I've got another surprise for you, Danny. The instant you step back through that pulsing you're going to be rescued. Olulu told me he saw a big salvage ship come down on the asteroid right after he carried you through into here. He saw it when he went for that

wom—for Joan. So you can pin the medals on me. I saved you from Olulu, and now—"

Joan's eyes widened. "You saved us from Olulu?"

"Uh-huh. Olulu wanted to make slaves out of you. I couldn't get at those knobs in his chest—he was too high up for me. Besides, I was afraid if I tried to dismantle him I'd be short-circuited or something. I left him for you, Danny."

"You—you—"

"Uh-huh. I told a little white lie, Danny. I knew if you thought he was going to take Joan apart you'd fight the way—well, the way a human fights for his woman. No automaton could stand up against that kind of rage, Danny. It's a little ridiculous, if you want my honest opinion, but . . . Hey, what goes on?"

Entirely without consulting her husband Joan had dropped to her knees and taken the little robot's knobular head firmly between her palms. As he drew back in alarm she implanted on his flat face a kiss so wet and vehement it almost short-circuited him from beam to stern.

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# PI IN THE SKY

By FREDRIC BROWN

*When sinister influences begin to shuffle the stars around for advertising purposes, brave Roger Phlutter bares his trusty penknife and Dr. Milton Hale dashes off to save the cosmos via taxicab!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Shifting Stars*

**R**OGER JEROME PHLUTTER, for whose absurd surname I offer no defense other than that it is genuine, was, at the time of the events of this story, a hard-working clerk in the office of the Cole Observatory.

He was a young man of no particular brilliance, although he performed his daily tasks assiduously and efficiently, studied the calculus at home for one hour every evening, and hoped some day to become a chief astronomer of some important observatory.

Nevertheless, our narration of the events of late March in the Year 1999 must begin with Roger Phlutter for the good and sufficient reason that he, of all men on earth, was the first observer of the stellar aberration.

Meet Roger Phlutter.

Tall, rather pale from spending too much time indoors, thickish shell-rimmed glasses, dark hair close-cropped in the style of the nineteen nineties, dressed neither particularly well nor badly, smokes cigarettes rather excessively . . .

At a quarter to five that afternoon, Roger was engaged in two simultaneous operations. One was examining, in a blink-microscope, a photographic plate taken late the previous night of a section in Gemini. The other was considering whether or not, on the three dollars remaining of his pay from last week, he dared phone Elsie and ask her to go somewhere with him.

Every normal young man has undoubtedly, at some time or other, shared with Roger Phlutter his second occupation, but not

everyone has operated or understands the operation of, a blink-microscope. So let us raise our eyes from Elsie to Gemini.

A blink-mike provides accommodation for two photographic plates taken of the same section of sky, but at different times. These plates are carefully juxtaposed and the operator may alternately focus his vision, through the eyepiece, first upon one and then upon the other, by means of a shutter. If the plates are identical, the operation of the shutter reveals nothing, but if one of the dots on the second plate differs from the position it occupied on the first, it will call attention to itself by seeming to jump back and forth as the shutter is manipulated.

Roger manipulated the shutter, and one of the dots jumped. So did Roger. He tried it again, forgetting—as we have—all about Elsie for the moment, and the dot jumped again. It jumped almost a tenth of a second.

Roger straightened up and scratched his head. He lighted a cigarette, put it down on the ash tray, and looked into the blink-mike again. The dot jumped again, when he used the shutter.

**H**ARRY WESSON, who worked the evening shift, had just come into the office and was hanging up his topcoat.

"Hey, Harry!" Roger said. "There's something wrong with this blinking blinker."

"Yeah?" said Harry.

"Yeah. Pollux moved a tenth of a second."

"Yeah?" said Harry. "Well, that's about right for parallax. Thirty-two light years—parallax of Pollux is point one oh one. Little over a tenth of a second, so if your comparison plate was taken about six months ago when the earth was on the other side of her orbit, that's about right."

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## A HILARIOUS COMPLETE FANTASTIC NOVELET

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An irate subordinate broke a heavy photographic plate over the head of James Truwell, Astronomer Royal

"But Harry, the comparison plate was taken night before last. They're twenty-four hours apart."

"You're crazy."

"Look for yourself."

It wasn't quite five o'clock yet, but Harry Wesson magnanimously overlooked that, and sat down in front of the blink-mike. He manipulated the shutter, and Pollux obligingly jumped.

There wasn't any doubt about it being Pollux, for it was far and away the brightest dot on the plate. Pollux is a star of 1.2 magnitude, one of the twenty brightest in the sky and by far the brightest in Gemini. And none of the faint stars around it had moved at all.

"Um," said Harry Wesson. He frowned and looked again. "One of those plates is mis-dated, that's all. I'll check into it first thing."

"Those plates aren't mis-dated," Roger said doggedly. "I dated them myself."

"That proves it," Harry told him. "Go on home. It's five o'clock. If Pollux moved a tenth of a second last night, I'll move it back for you."

So Roger left.

He felt uneasy somehow, as though he shouldn't have. He couldn't put his finger on just what worried him, but something did. He decided to walk home instead of taking the bus.

Pollux was a fixed star. It couldn't have moved a tenth of a second in twenty-four hours.

"Let's see—thirty-two light years," Roger said to himself. "Tenth of a second. Why, that would be movement several times faster than the speed of light. Which is positively silly!"

Wasn't it?

He didn't feel much like studying or reading tonight. Was three dollars enough to take out Elsie?

The three balls of a pawn-shop loomed ahead, and Roger succumbed to temptation. He pawned his watch, and then phoned Elsie. Dinner and a show?

"Why certainly, Roger."

So until he took her home at one-thirty, he managed to forget astronomy. Nothing odd about that. It would have been strange if he had managed to remember it.

But his feeling of restlessness came back as soon as he had left her. At first, he didn't remember why. He knew merely that he didn't feel quite like going home yet.

The corner tavern was still open, and

he dropped in for a drink. He was having his second one when he remembered. He ordered a third.

"Hank," he said to the bartender. "You know Pollux?"

"Pollux who?" asked Hank.

"Skip it," said Roger. He had another drink, and thought it over. Yes, he'd made a mistake somewhere. Pollux couldn't have moved.

He went outside and started to walk home. He was almost there when it occurred to him to look up at Pollux. Not that, with the naked eye, he could detect a displacement of a tenth of a second, but he felt curious.

He looked up, allocated himself by the sickle of Leo, and then found Gemini—Castor and Pollux were the only stars in Gemini visible, for it wasn't a particularly good night for seeing. They were there, all right, but he thought they looked a little farther apart than usual. Absurd, because that would be a matter of degrees, not minutes or seconds.

He stared at them for a while, and then looked across to the dipper. Then he stopped walking and stood there. He closed his eyes and opened them again, carefully.

The dipper just didn't look right. It was distorted. There seemed to be more space between Alioth and Mizer, in the handle, than between Mizar and Alkaid. Phedda and Merak, in the bottom of the dipper, were closer together, making the angle between the bottom and the lip steeper. Quite a bit steeper.

Unbelievably, he ran an imaginary line from the pointers, Merak and Dubhe, to the North Star. The line curved. It had to. If he ran it straight, it missed Polaris by maybe five degrees.

**B**REATHING a bit hard, Roger took off his glasses and polished them very carefully with his handkerchief. He put them back on again and the dipper was still crooked.

So was Leo, when he looked back to it. At any rate, Regulus wasn't where it should be by a degree or two.

A degree or two! At the distance of Regulus. Was it sixty-five light years? Something like that.

Then, in time to save his sanity, Roger remembered that he'd been drinking. He went home without daring to look upward again. He went to bed, but couldn't sleep.

He didn't feel drunk. He grew more excited, wide awake.

He wondered if he dared phone the observatory. Would he sound drunk over the phone? The devil with whether he sounded that way or not, he finally decided. He went to the telephone in his pajamas.

"Sorry," said the operator.

"What d'ya mean, sorry?"

"I cannot give you that number," said the operator, in dulcet tones. And then, "I am sorry. We do not have that information."

He got the chief operator, and the information. Cole Observatory had been so deluged with calls from amateur astronomers that they had found it necessary to request the telephone company to discontinue all incoming calls save long distance ones from other observatories.

"Thanks," said Roger. "Will you get me a cab?"

It was an unusual request, but the chief operator obliged and got him a cab.

He found the Cole Observatory in a state resembling a madhouse.

The following morning most newspapers carried the news. Most of them gave it two or three inches on an inside page, but the facts were there.

The facts were that a number of stars, in general the brightest ones, within the past forty-eight hours, had developed noticeable proper motions.

"This does not imply," quipped the New York Spotlight, "that their motions have been in any way improper in the past. 'Proper motion' to an astronomer means the movement of a star across the face of the sky with relation to other stars. Hitherto, a star named 'Barnard's Star' in the constellation Ophiuchus has exhibited the greatest proper motion of any known star, moving at the rate of ten and a quarter seconds a year. 'Barnard's Star' is not visible to the naked eye."

Probably no astronomer on earth slept that day.

The observatories locked their doors, with their full staffs on the inside, and admitted no one except occasional newspaper reporters who stayed a while and went away with puzzled faces, convinced at last that something strange was happening.

**B**LINK-microscopes blinked, and so did astronomers. Coffee was consumed in prodigious quantities. Police riot squads were called to six United States observatories. Two of these calls were occasioned by attempts to break in on the part of fran-

tic amateurs without. The other four were summoned to quell fist-fights developing out of arguments within the observatories themselves. The office of Lick Observatory was a shambles, and James Truwell, Astronomer Royal of England, was sent to London Hospital with a mild concussion, the result of having a heavy photographic plate smashed over his head by an irate subordinate.

But these incidents were exceptions. The observatories, in general, were well-ordered madhouses.

The center of attention in the more enterprising ones was the loud-speaker in which reports from the Eastern Hemisphere could be relayed to the inmates. Practically all observatories kept open wires to the night side of earth, where the phenomena were still under scrutiny.

Astronomers under the night skies of Singapore, Shanghai and Sydney did their observing, as it were, directly into the business end of a long-distance telephone hook-up.

Particularly of interest were reports from Sydney and Melbourne, whence came reports on the southern skies not visible—even at night—from Europe or the United States. The Southern Cross was by these reports, a cross no longer, its Alpha and Beta being shifted northward. Alpha and Beta Centauri, Canopus and Achernar all showed considerable proper motion—all, generally speaking, northward. Triangulum Australe and the Magellanic Clouds were undisturbed. Sigma Octanis, the weak pole star, had not moved.

Disturbance of the southern sky, then, was much less than in the northern one, in point of the number of stars displaced. However, relative proper motion of the stars which were disturbed was greater. While the general direction of movement of the few stars which did move was northward, their paths were not directly north, nor did they converge upon any exact point in space.

United States and European astronomers digested these facts and drank more coffee.

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## CHAPTER II

### *Heavenly Omelet*

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**E**VENING papers, particularly in America, showed greater awareness that something indeed unusual was happening in

the skies. Most of them moved the story to the front page—but not the banner headlines—giving it a half-column with a runover that was long or short, depending upon the editor's luck in obtaining quotable statements from astronomers.

The statements, when obtained, were invariably statements of fact and not of opinion. The facts themselves, said these gentlemen, were sufficiently startling, and opinions would be premature. Wait and see. Whatever was happening was happening fast.

"How fast?" asked an editor.

"Faster than possible," was the reply.

Perhaps it is unfair to say that no editor procured expressions of opinion thus early. Charles Wangren, enterprising editor of "The Chicago Blade," spent a small fortune in long-distance telephone calls. Out of possibly sixty attempts, he finally reached the chief astronomers at five observatories. He asked each of them the same question.

"What, in your opinion, is a possible cause, any possible cause, of the stellar movements of the last night or two?"

He tabulated the results.

"I wish I knew,"—Geo. F. Stubbs, Tripp Observatory, Long Island.

"Somebody or something is crazy, and I hope it's me—I mean I,"—Henry Collister McAdams, Lloyd Observatory, Boston.

"What's happening is impossible. There can't be any cause,"—Letton Tischauer Tinney, Burgoyne Observatory, Albuquerque.

"I'm looking for an expert on Astrology. Know one?"—Patrick R. Whitaker, Lucas Observatory, Vermont.

"It's all wacky!"—Giles Mahew Frazier, Grant Observatory, Richmond.

Sadly studying this tabulation, which had cost him \$187.35—including tax—to obtain, Editor Wangren signed a voucher to cover the long distance calls and then dropped his tabulation into the wastebasket. He telephoned his regular space-rates writer on scientific subjects.

"Can you give me a series of articles—two-three thousand words each—on all this astronomical excitement?"

"Sure," said the writer. "But what excitement?" It transpired that he'd just got back from a fishing trip and had neither read a newspaper nor happened to look up at the sky. But he wrote the articles. He even got sex appeal into them through illustrations, by using ancient star-charts showing the constellations in dishabille, by reproducing

certain famous paintings such as "The Origin of the Milky Way" and by using a photograph of a girl in a bathing suit sighting a hand telescope, presumably at one of the errant stars. Circulation of "The Chicago Blade" increased by 21.7%.

It was five o'clock again in the office of the Cole Observatory, just twenty-four and a quarter hours after the beginning of all the commotion. Roger Phlutter—yes, we're back to him again—woke up suddenly when a hand was placed on his shoulder.

"Go on home, Roger," said Mervin Armbruster, his boss, in a kindly tone.

**R**OGER sat upright suddenly. "But Mr. Armbruster," he said, "I'm sorry I fell asleep."

"Bosh," said Armbruster. "You can't stay here forever, none of us can. Go on home."

Roger Phlutter went home. But when he'd taken a bath, he felt more restless than sleepy. It was only six-fifteen. He phoned Elsie.

"I'm awfully sorry, Roger, but I have another date. What's going on, Roger? The stars, I mean."

"Gosh, Elsie—they're moving. Nobody knows."

"But I thought all the stars moved," Elsie protested. "The sun's a star, isn't it? Once you told me the sun was moving toward a point in Samson."

"Hercules."

"Hercules, then. Since you said all the stars were moving, what is everybody getting excited about?"

"This is different," said Roger. "Take Canopus. It's started moving at the rate of seven light-years a day. It can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"Because," said Roger patiently, "nothing can move faster than light."

"But if it is moving that fast, then it can," said Elsie. "Or else maybe your telescope is wrong or something. Anyway, it's pretty far off, isn't it?"

"A hundred and sixty light years. So far away that we see it a hundred and sixty years ago."

"Then maybe it isn't moving at all," said Elsie. "I mean, maybe it quit moving a hundred and fifty years ago and you're getting all excited about something that doesn't matter any more because it's all over with. Still love me?"

"I sure do, honey. Can't you break that date?"

"'Fraid not, Roger. But I wish I could."

He had to be content with that. He decided to walk up town to eat.

It was early evening, and too early to see stars overhead, although the clear blue sky was darkening. When the stars did come out tonight, Roger knew, few of the constellations would be recognizable.

As he walked, he thought over Elsie's comments and decided that they were as intelligent as anything he'd heard at Cole. In one way they'd brought out one angle he'd never thought of before, and that made it more incomprehensible.

All these movements had started the same evening—yet they hadn't. Centauri must have started moving four years or so ago, and Riegel five hundred and forty years ago when Christopher Columbus was still in short pants if any, and Vega must have started acting up the year he—Roger, not Vega—was born, twenty-six years ago. Each star out of the hundreds must have started on a date in exact relation to its distance from Earth. Exact relation, to a light-second, for checkups of all the photographic plates taken night before last indicated that all the new stellar movements had started at four ten a.m. Greenwich time. What a mess!

Unless this meant that light, after all, had infinite velocity.

If it didn't have—and it is symptomatic of Roger's perplexity that he could postulate that incredible "if" — then — then what? Things were just as puzzling as before.

Mostly, he felt outraged that such events should be happening.

He went into a restaurant and sat down. A radio was blaring out the latest composition in dissarythm, the new quarter-tone dance music in which chorded woodwinds provided background patterns for the mad melodies pounded on tuned tomtoms. Between each number and the next a phrenetic announcer extolled the virtues of a product.

Munching a sandwich, Roger listened appreciatively to the dissarythm and managed not to hear the commercials. Most intelligent people of the nineties had developed a type of radio deafness which enabled them not to hear a human voice coming from a loud-speaker, although they could hear and enjoy the then infrequent intervals of music between announcements. In an age when advertising competition was so keen that there was scarcely a bare wall or an unbillboarded lot within miles of a population center, dis-

criminating people could retain normal outlooks on life only by carefully-cultivated partial blindness and partial deafness which enabled them to ignore the bulk of that concerted assault upon their senses.

For that reason a good part of the newscast which followed the dissarythm program went, as it were, into one of Roger's ears and out of the other before it occurred to him that he was not listening to a panegyric on patent breakfast-foods.

**H**E THOUGHT he recognized the voice, and after a sentence or two he was sure that it was that of Milton Hale, the eminent physicist whose new theory on the principle of indeterminacy had recently occasioned so much scientific controversy. Apparently, Dr. Hale was being interviewed by a radio announcer.

"—a heavenly body, therefore, may have position or velocity, but it may not be said to have both at the same time, with relation to any given space-time frame."

"Dr. Hale, can you put that into common every-day language?" said the syrupy-smooth voice of the interviewer.

"That is common language, sir. Scientifically expressed, in terms of the Heisenberg contraction-principle, then  $n$  to the seventh power in parentheses, representing the pseudo-position of a Diedrich quantum-integer in relation to the seventh coefficient of curvature of mass—"

"Thank you, Dr. Hale, but I fear you are just a bit over the heads of our listeners."

"And your own head," thought Roger Phlutter.

"I am sure, Dr. Hale, that the question of greatest interest to our audience is whether these unprecedented stellar movements are real or illusory?"

"Both. They are real with reference to the frame of space but not with reference to the frame of space-time."

"Can you clarify that, Doctor?"

"I believe I can. The difficulty is purely epistemological. In strict causality, the impact of the macroscopic—"

"The slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe," thought Roger Phlutter.

"—upon the parallelism of the entropy-gradient."

"Bah!" said Roger, aloud.

"Did you say something, sir?" asked the waitress. Roger noticed her for the first time. She was small and blonde and cuddly. Roger smiled at her.

"That depends upon the space-time frame from which one regards it," he said, judicially. "The difficulty is epistemological."

To make up for that, he tipped her more than he should, and left.

The world's most eminent physicist, he realized, knew less of what was happening than did the general public. The public knew that the fixed stars were moving, or that they weren't. Obviously Dr. Hale didn't even know that. Under a smoke-screen of qualifications, Hale had hinted that they were doing both.

Roger looked upward, but only a few stars, faint in the early evening, were visible through the halation of the myriad neon and spiegel-light signs. Too early yet, he decided.

He had one drink at a nearby bar, but it didn't taste quite right to him so he didn't finish it. He hadn't realized what was wrong, but he was punch-drunk from lack of sleep. He merely knew that he wasn't sleepy any more and intended to keep on walking until he felt like going to bed. Anyone hitting him over the head with a well-padded blackjack would have been doing him a signal service, but no one took the trouble.

He kept on walking and, after a while, turned into the brilliantly lighted lobby of a cineplus theater. He bought a ticket and took his seat just in time to see the sticky end of one of the three feature pictures. Followed several advertisements which he managed to look at without seeing.

"We bring you next," said the screen, "a special visicast of the night sky of London, where it is now three o'clock in the morning."

The screen went black, with hundreds of tiny dots that were stars. Roger leaned forward to watch and listen carefully—this would be a broadcast and visicast of facts, not of verbose nothingness.

"The arrow," said the screen, as an arrow appeared upon it, "is now pointing to Polaris, the pole star, which is now ten degrees from the celestial pole in the direction of Ursa Major. Ursa Major itself, the Big Dipper, is no longer recognizable as a dipper, but the arrow will now point to the stars that formerly composed it."

Roger breathlessly followed the arrow and the voice.

"Alkaid and Dubhe," said the voice. "The fixed stars are no longer fixed, but—" The picture changed abruptly to a scene in a modern kitchen. "—the qualities and excellences of Stellar's Stoves do not change.

Foods cooked by the super-induced vibratory method taste as good as ever. Stellar Stoves are unexcelled."

Leisurely, Roger Phlutter stood up and made his way out into the aisle. He took his pen-knife from his pocket as he walked toward the screen. One easy jump took him up onto the low stage. His slashes into the fabric were not angry ones. They were careful, methodical cuts intelligently designed to accomplish a maximum of damage with a minimum of expenditure of effort.

**T**HE damage was done, and thoroughly, by the time three strong ushers gathered him in. He offered no resistance either to them or to the police to whom they gave him. In night court, an hour later, he listened quietly to the charges against him.

"Guilty or not guilty?" asked the presiding magistrate.

"Your Honor, that is purely a question of epistemology," said Roger, earnestly. "The fixed stars move, but Corny Toastys, the world's greatest breakfast food, still represents the pseudo-position of a Diedrich quantum-integer in relation to the seventh coefficient of curvature!"

Ten minutes later, he was sleeping soundly. In a cell, it is true, but soundly nonetheless. The police left him there because they had realized he needed to sleep. . . .

Among other minor tragedies of that night can be included the case of the schooner "Ransagansett," off the coast of California. Well off the coast of California! A sudden squall had blown her miles off course, how many miles the skipper could only guess.

The "Ransagansett" was an American vessel, with a German crew, under Venezuelan registry, engaged in running booze from Ensenada, Baja California, up the coast to Canada, then in the throes of a prohibition experiment. The "Ransagansett" was an ancient craft with foul engines and an untrustworthy compass. During the two days of the storm, her outdated radio receiver—vintage of 1965—had gone haywire beyond the ability of Gross, the first mate, to repair.

But now only a mist remained of the storm, and the remaining shreds of wind were blowing it away. Hans Gross, holding an ancient astrolabe, stood on the deck waiting. About him was utter darkness, for the ship was running without lights to avoid the coastal patrols.

"She clearing, Mister Gross?" called the voice of the captain from below.



"Aye, sir. Idt iss glearing rabidly."

In the cabin, Captain Randall went back to his game of blackjack with the second mate and the engineer. The crew—an elderly German named Weiss, with a wooden leg—was asleep abaft the scuttlebutt—wherever that may have been.

A half hour went by. An hour, and the captain was losing heavily to Helmstadt, the engineer.

"Mister Gross!" he called out.

There wasn't any answer and he called again and still obtained no response.

"Just a minute, mein fine feathered friends," he said to the second mate and engineer, and went up the companionway to the deck.

Gross was standing there staring upward with his mouth open. The mists were gone.

"Mister Gross," said Captain Randall.

The second mate didn't answer. The captain saw that his second mate was revolving slowly where he stood.

"Hans!" said Captain Randall, "What the devil's wrong with you?" Then he too, looked up.

Superficially the sky looked perfectly normal. No angels flying around nor sound of airplane motors. The dipper—Captain Randall turned around slowly, but more rapidly than Hans Gross. Where was the Big Dipper?

For that matter, where was anything? There wasn't a constellation anywhere that he could recognize. No sickle of Leo. No belt of Orion. No horns of Taurus.

Worse, there was a group of eight bright stars that ought to have been a constellation, for they were shaped roughly like an octagon. Yet if such a constellation had ever existed, he'd never seen it, for he'd been around the Horn and Good Hope. Maybe at that—But no, there wasn't any Southern Cross!

Dazedly, Captain Randall walked to the companionway.

"Mister Weisskopf," he called. "Mister Helmstadt. Come on deck."

They came and looked. Nobody said anything for quite a while.

"Shut off the engines, Mister Helmstadt," said the captain. Helmstadt saluted—the first time he ever had—and went below.

"Captain, shall I vake opp Veiss?" asked Weisskopf.

"What for?"

"I don't know."

The captain considered. "Wake him up," he said.

"I think ve are on der blanet Mars," said Gross.

But the captain had thought of that and rejected it.

"No," he said firmly. "From any planet in the solar system the constellations would look approximately the same."

"You mean ve are oudt of de cosmos?"

The throb of the engines suddenly ceased and there was only the soft familiar lapping of the waves against the hull and the gentle familiar rocking of the boat.

Weisskopf returned with Weiss, and Helmstadt came on deck and saluted again.

"Vell, Captain?"

Captain Randall waved a hand to the after deck, piled high with cases of liquor under a canvas tarpaulin. "Break out the cargo," he ordered.

The blackjack game was not resumed. At dawn, under a sun they had never expected to see again—and, for that matter, certainly were not seeing at the moment—the five unconscious men were moved from the ship to the Port of San Francisco Jail by members of the coast patrol. During the night the "Ransagansett" had drifted through the Golden Gate and bumped gently into the dock of the Berkeley ferry.

In tow at the stern of the schooner was a big canvas tarpaulin. It was transfixed by a harpoon whose rope was firmly tied to the after-mast. Its presence there was never explained officially, although days later Captain Randall had vague recollection of having harpooned a sperm whale during the night. But the elderly able-bodied seaman named Weiss never did find out what happened to his wooden leg, which is perhaps just as well.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Mixed Up But Noble, Nonetheless*

MILTON HALE, Ph. D., eminent physicist, had finished broadcasting and the program was off the air.

"Thank you very much, Dr. Hale," said the radio announcer. The yellow light went on and stayed. The mike was dead. "Uh—your check will be waiting for you at the window. You—uh—know where."

"I know where," said the physicist. He was a rotund, jolly-looking little man. With his

bushy white beard, he resembled a pocket edition of Santa Claus. His eyes twinkled and he smoked a short stubby pipe.

He left the sound-proof studio and walked briskly down the hall to the cashier's window. "Hello, sweetheart," he said to the girl on duty there. "I think you have two checks for Dr. Hale."

"You are Dr. Hale?"

"I sometimes wonder," said the little man. "But I carry identification that seems to prove it."

"Two checks?"

"Two checks. Both for the same broadcast, by special arrangement. By the way, there is an excellent revue at the Mabry Theater this evening."

"Is there? Yes, here are your checks, Dr. Hale. One for seventy-five and one for twenty-five. Is that correct?"

"Gratifyingly correct. Now about the revue at the Mabry?"

"If you wish I'll call my husband and ask him about it," said the girl. "He's the doorman over there."

Dr. Hale sighed deeply, but his eyes still twinkled. "I think he'll agree," he said. "Here are the tickets, my dear, and you can take him. I find that I have work to do this evening."

The girl's eyes widened, but she took the tickets.

Dr. Hale went into the phone booth and called his home. His home, and Dr. Hale, were both run by his elder sister. "Agatha, I must remain at the office this evening," he said.

"Milton, you know you can work just as well in your study here at home. I heard your broadcast, Milton. It was wonderful."

"It was sheer balderdash, Agatha. Utter rot. What did I say?"

"Why, you said that—uh—that the stars were—I mean, you were not—"

"Exactly, Agatha. My idea was to avert panic on the part of the populace. If I'd told them the truth, they'd have worried. But by being smug and scientific, I let them get the idea that everything was—uh—under control. Do you know, Agatha, what I meant by the parallelism of an entropy-gradient?"

"Why—not exactly."

"Neither did I."

"Milton, have you been drinking?"

"Not y— No, I haven't. I really can't come home to work this evening, Agatha. I'm using my study at the university, because I

must have access to the library there, for reference. And the star-charts."

"But, Milton, how about that money for your broadcast? You know it isn't safe for you to have money in your pocket when you're feeling—like this."

"It isn't money, Agatha. It's a check, and I'll mail it to you before I go to the office. I won't cash it myself. How's that?"

"Well—if you must have access to the library, I suppose you must. Good-by, Milton."

Dr. Hale went across the street to the drug store. There he bought a stamp and envelope and cashed the twenty-five dollar check. The seventy-five dollar one he put into the envelope and mailed.

Standing beside the mailbox, he glanced up at the early evening sky—shuddered, and hastily lowered his eyes. He took the straightest possible line for the nearest tavern and ordered a double Scotch.

"Y'ain't been in for a long time, Dr. Hale," said Mike, the bartender.

"That I haven't, Mike. Pour me another."

"Sure. On the house, this time. We had your broadcast tuned in on the radio just now. It was swell."

"Yes."

"It sure was. I was kind of worried what was happening up there, with my son an aviator and all. But as long as you scientific guys know what it's all about, I guess it's all right. That was sure a good speech, Doc. But there's one question I'd like to ask you."

"I was afraid of that," said Dr. Hale.

"These stars. They're moving, going somewhere. But where they're going? I mean, like you said, if they are."

"There's no way of telling that, exactly, Mike."

"Aren't they moving in a straight line, each one of them?"

**F**OR just a moment the celebrated scientist hesitated.

"Well—yes and no, Mike. According to spectroscopic analysis, they're maintaining the same distance from us, each one of them. So they're really moving—if they're moving—in circles around us. But the circles are straight, as it were. I mean, it seems that we're in the center of those circles, so the stars that are moving aren't coming closer to us or receding."

"You could draw lines for those circles?"

"On a star-globe, yes. It's been done. They

all seem to be heading for a certain area of the sky, but not for a given point. In other words, they don't intersect."

"What part of the sky they going to?"

"Approximately between Ursa Major and Leo, Mike. The ones farthest from there are moving fastest, the ones nearest are moving slower. But darn you, Mike, I came in here to forget about stars, not to talk about them. Give me another."

"In a minute, Doc. When they get there, are they going to stop or keep on going?"

"How the devil do I know, Mike? They started suddenly, all at the same time, and with full original velocity—I mean, they started out at the same speed they're going now—without warming up, so to speak—so I suppose they could stop just as unexpectedly."

He stopped just as suddenly as the stars might. He stared at his reflection in the mirror back of the bar as though he'd never seen it before.

"What's the matter, Doc?"

"Mike!"

"Yes, Doc?"

"Mike, you're a genius."

"Me? You're kidding."

Dr. Hale groaned. "Mike, I'm going to have to go to the university to work this out. So I can have access to the library and the star-globe there. You're making an honest man out of me, Mike. Whatever kind of Scotch this is, wrap me up a bottle."

"It's Tartan Plaid. A quart?"

"A quart, and make it snappy. I've got to see a man about a dog-star."

"Serious, Doc?"

Dr. Hale sighed audibly. "You brought that on yourself, Mike. Yes, the dog-star is Sirius. I wish I'd never come in here, Mike. My first night out in weeks, and you ruin it."

He took a cab to the university, let himself in, and turned on the lights in his private study and in the library. Then he took a good stiff slug of Tartan Plaid and went to work.

First, by telling the chief operator who he was and arguing a bit, he got a telephone connection with the chief astronomer of Cole Observatory.

"This is Hale, Armbruster," he said. "I've got an idea, but I want to check my facts before I start to work on it. Last information I had, there were four-hundred sixty-eight stars exhibiting new proper motion. Is that still correct?"

"Yes, Milton. The same ones are still at it, and no others."

"Good. I have a list then. Has there been any change in speed of motion of any of them?"

"No. Impossible as it seems, it's constant. What is your idea?"

"I want to check my theory first. If it works out into anything, I'll call you." But he forgot to.

It was a long, painful job. First he made a chart of the heavens in the area between Ursa Major and Leo. Across that chart he drew 468 lines representing the projected path of each of the aberrant stars. At the border of the chart, where each line entered, he made a notation of the apparent velocity of the star—not in light-years per hour—but in degrees per hour, to the fifth decimal.

Then he did some reasoning.

"Postulate that the motion which began simultaneously will end simultaneously," he told himself. "Try a guess at the time. Let's try ten o'clock tomorrow evening."

He tried it and looked at the series of positions indicated upon the chart. No.

Try one o'clock in the morning. It looked almost like—sense!

Try midnight.

That did it. At any rate, it was close enough. The calculation could be only a few minutes off one way or the other and there was no point now in working out the exact time. Now that he knew the incredible fact.

He took another drink and stared at the chart grimly.

**A** TRIP into the library gave Dr. Hale the further information he needed. The address!

Thus began the saga of Dr. Hale's journey. A useless journey, it is true, but one that should rank with the trip of the messenger to Garcia.

He started it with a drink. Then, knowing the combination, he rifled the safe in the office of the president of the university. The note he left in the safe was a masterpiece of brevity. It read:

Taking money. Explain later.

Then he took another drink and put the bottle in his pocket. He went outside and hailed a taxicab. He got in.

"Where to, sir?" asked the cabby.

Dr. Hale gave an address.

"Fremont Street?" said the cabby. "Sorry,

sir, but I don't know where that is."

"In Boston," said Dr. Hale. "I should have told you, in Boston."

"Boston? You mean Boston, Massachusetts? That's a long way from here."

"Therefore we better start right away," said Dr. Hale, reasonably. A brief financial discussion and the passing of money, borrowed from the university safe, set the driver's mind at rest, and they started.

It was a bitter cold night, for March, and the heater in the taxi didn't work any too well. But the Tartan Plaid worked superlatively for both Dr. Hale and the cabby, and by the time they reached New Haven, they were singing old-time songs lustily.

"Off we go, into the wide, wild yonder . . ." their voices roared.

It is regrettably reported, but possibly untrue, that in Hartford Dr. Hale leered out of the window at a young woman waiting for a late street-car and asked her if she wanted to go to Boston. Apparently, however, she didn't, for at five o'clock in the morning when the cab drew up in front of 614 Fremont Street, Boston, only Dr. Hale and the driver were in the cab.

Dr. Hale got out and looked at the house. It was a millionaire's mansion, and it was surrounded by a high iron fence with barbed wire on top of it. The gate in the fence was locked and there was no bell button to push.

But the house was only a stone's throw from the sidewalk, and Dr. Hale was not to be deterred. He threw a stone. Then another. Finally he succeeded in smashing a window.

After a brief interval, a man appeared in the window. A butler, Dr. Hale decided.

"I'm Dr. Milton Hale," he called out. "I want to see Rutherford R. Sniveley, right away. It's important."

"Mr. Sniveley is not at home, sir," said the butler. "And about that window—"

"The devil with the window," shouted Dr. Hale. "Where is Sniveley?"

"On a fishing trip."

"Where?"

"I have orders not to give that information."

Dr. Hale was just a little drunk, perhaps. "You'll give it out just the same," he roared. "By orders of the President of the United States."

The butler laughed. "I don't see him."

"You will," said Hale.

He got back in the cab. The driver had fallen asleep, but Hale shook him awake.

"The White House," said Dr. Hale.

"Huh?"

"The White House, in Washington," said Dr. Hale. "And hurry!" He pulled a hundred dollar bill from his pocket. The cabby looked at it, and groaned. Then he put the bill into his pocket and started the cab.

A light snow was beginning to fall.

As the cab drove off, Rutherford R. Sniveley, grinning, stepped back from the window. Mr. Sniveley had no butler.

If Dr. Hale had been more familiar with the peculiarities of the eccentric Mr. Sniveley, he would have known Sniveley kept no servants in the place overnight, but lived alone in the big house at 614 Fremont Street. Each morning at ten o'clock, a small army of servants descended upon the house, did their work as rapidly as possible, and were required to depart before the witching hour of noon. Aside from these two hours of every day, Mr. Sniveley lived in solitary splendor. He had few, if any, social contacts.

Aside from the few hours a day he spent administering his vast interests as one of the country's leading manufacturers, Mr. Sniveley's time was his own and he spent practically all of it in his workshop, making gadgets.

**S**NIVELEY had an ash-tray which would hand him a lighted cigar any time he spoke sharply to it, and a radio receiver so delicately adjusted that it would cut in automatically on Sniveley-sponsored programs and shut off again when they were finished. He had a bathtub that provided a full orchestral accompaniment to his singing therein, and he had a machine which would read aloud to him from any book which he placed in its hopper.

His life may have been a lonely one, but it was not without such material comforts. Eccentric, yes, but Mr. Sniveley could afford to be eccentric with a net income of four million dollars a year. Not bad for a man who'd started life as the son of a shipping clerk.

Mr. Sniveley chuckled as he watched the taxicab drive away, and then he went back to bed and to the sleep of the just.

"So somebody had figured things out nineteen hours ahead of time," he thought. "Well, a lot of good it would do them!"

There wasn't any law to punish him for what he'd done. . . .

Bookstores did a landoffice business that day in books on astronomy. The public,

apathetic at first, was deeply interested now. Even ancient and musty volumes of Newton's "Principia" sold at premium prices.

The ether blared with comment upon the new wonder of the skies. Little of the comment was professional, or even intelligent, for most astronomers were asleep that day. They'd managed to stay awake the first forty-eight hours from the start of the phenomena, but the third day found them worn out mentally and physically, and inclined to let the stars take care of themselves while they—the astronomers, not the stars—caught up on sleep.

Staggering offers from the telecast and broadcast studios enticed a few of them to attempt lectures, but their efforts were dreary things, better forgotten. Dr. Carver Blake, broadcasting from KNB, fell soundly asleep between a perigee and an apogee.

Physicists were also greatly in demand. The most eminent of them all, however, was sought in vain. The solitary clue to Dr. Milton Hale's disappearance, the brief note "Taking money. Explain later," wasn't much of a help. His sister Agatha feared the worst.

For the first time in history, astronomical news made banner headlines in the newspapers.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Deep-Dyed Conspirator*

**S**NOW had started early that morning along the northern Atlantic seaboard and now it was growing steadily worse. Just outside Waterbury, Conn., the driver of Dr. Hale's cab began to weaken.

It wasn't human, he thought, for a man to be expected to drive to Boston and then, without stopping, from Boston to Washington. Not even for a hundred dollars.

Not in a storm like this. Why, he could see only a dozen yards ahead through the driving snow, even when he could manage to keep his eyes open. His fare was slumbering soundly in the back seat. Maybe he could get away with stopping here along the road, for an hour, to catch some sleep. Just an hour. His fare wouldn't ever know the difference. The guy must be loony, he thought, or why hadn't he taken a plane or a train?

Dr. Hale would have, of course, if he'd thought of it. But he wasn't used to travel-

ing and besides there'd been the Tartan Plaid. A taxi had seemed the easiest way to get anywhere—no worrying about tickets and connections and stations. Money was no object, and the plaid condition of his mind had caused him to overlook the human factor involved in an extended journey by taxi.

When he awoke, almost frozen, in the parked taxi, that human factor dawned upon him. The driver was so sound asleep that no amount of shaking could arouse him. Dr. Hale's watch had stopped, so he had no idea where he was or what time it was.

Unfortunately, too, he didn't know how to drive a car. He took a quick drink to keep from freezing, and then got out of the cab, and as he did so, a car stopped.

It was a policeman—what is more it was a policeman in a million.

Yelling over the roar of the storm, Hale hailed him.

"I'm Dr. Hale," he shouted. "We're lost. Where am I?"

"Get in here before you freeze," ordered the policeman. "Do you mean Dr. Milton Hale, by any chance?"

"Yes."

"I've read all your books, Dr. Hale," said the policeman. "Physics is my hobby, and I've always wanted to meet you. I want to ask you about the revised value of the quantum."

"This is life or death," said Dr. Hale. "Can you take me to the nearest airport, quick?"

"Of course, Dr. Hale."

"And look—there's a driver in that cab, and he'll freeze to death unless we send aid."

"I'll put him in the back seat of my car, and then run the cab off the road. We'll take care of details later."

"Hurry, please."

The obliging policeman hurried. He got back in and started the car.

"About the revised quantum value, Dr. Hale," he began, then stopped talking.

Dr. Hale was sound asleep. The policeman drove to Waterbury Airport, one of the largest in the world since the population shift from New York City northwards in the 1960's and 70's had given it a central position. In front of the ticket office, he gently awakened Dr. Hale.

"This is the airport, sir," he said.

Even as he spoke, Dr. Hale was leaping out of the car and stumbling into the building, yelling, "Thanks," over his shoulder and nearly falling down in doing so.

The warm-up roaring of the motors of a

superstratoliner out on the field lent wings to his heels as he dashed for the ticket window.

"What plane's that?" he yelled.

"Washington Special, due out in one minute. But I don't think you can make it."

Dr. Hale slapped a hundred-dollar bill on the ledge. "Ticket," he gasped. "Keep change."

He grabbed the ticket and ran, getting into the plane just as the doors were being closed. Panting, he fell into a seat, the ticket still in his hand. He was sound asleep before the hostess strapped him in for the blind take-off.

An hour later, the hostess awakened him. The passengers were disembarking.

Dr. Hale rushed out of the plane, and ran across the field to the airport building. A big clock told him that it was nine o'clock, and he felt elated as he ran for the door marked "Taxicabs."

He got into the nearest one.

"White House," he told the driver. "How long'll it take?"

"Ten minutes."

**D**R. HALE gave a sigh of relief and sank back against the cushions. He didn't go back to sleep this time. He was wide awake now. But he closed his eyes to think out the words he'd use in explaining matters. . . .

"Here you are, sir."

Dr. Hale gave the driver a bill and hurried out of the cab and into the building. It didn't look like he expected it to look. But there was a desk and he ran up to it.

"I've got to see the President, quick. It's vital."

The clerk frowned. "The president of what?"

Dr. Hale's eyes went wide. "The president of wh— Say, what building is this? And what town?"

The clerk's frown deepened. "This is the White House Hotel," he said. "Seattle, Washington."

Dr. Hale fainted. He woke up in a hospital three hours later. It was then midnight, Pacific Time, which meant it was three o'clock in the morning on the Eastern Seaboard. It had, in fact, been midnight already in Washington, D. C., and in Boston, when he had been leaving the Washington Special in Seattle.

Dr. Hale rushed to the window and shook his fists, both of them, at the sky. A futile gesture.

Back in the East, however, the storm had stopped by twilight, leaving a light mist in the air. The star-conscious public thereupon deluged the weather bureaus with telephoned requests about the persistence of the mist.

"A breeze off the ocean is expected," they were told. "It is blowing now, in fact, and within an hour or two will have cleared off the light fog."

By eleven-fifteen the skies of Boston were clear.

Untold thousands braved the bitter cold and stood staring upward at the unfolding pageant of the no-longer-eternal stars. It almost looked as though—an incredible development had occurred.

And then, gradually, the murmur grew. By a quarter to twelve, the thing was certain, and the murmur hushed and then grew louder than ever, waxing toward midnight. Different people reacted differently, of course, as might be expected. There was laughter as well as indignation, cynical amusement as well as shocked horror. There was even admiration.

Soon in certain parts of the city, a concerted movement on the part of those who knew an address on Fremont Street, began to take place. Movement afoot and in cars and public vehicles, converging.

At five minutes of twelve, Rutherford R. Sniveley sat waiting within his house. He was denying himself the pleasure of looking until, at the last moment, the thing was complete.

It was going well. The gathering murmur of voices, mostly angry voices, outside his house told him that. He heard his name shouted.

Just the same he waited until the twelfth stroke of the clock before he stepped out upon the balcony. Much as he wanted to look upward, he forced himself to look down at the street first. The milling crowd was there, and it was angry. But he had only contempt for the milling crowd.

Police cars were pulling up, too, and he recognized the mayor of Boston getting out of one of them, and the Chief of Police was with him. But so what? There wasn't any law covering this.

Then having denied himself the supreme pleasure long enough, he turned his eyes up to the silent sky, and there it was. The four hundred and sixty-eight brightest stars spelling out:



USE  
SNIVELEY'S  
SOAP

For just a second did his satisfaction last. Then his face began to turn apoplectic purple.

"My heavens!" said Mr. Sniveley. "It's spelled wrong!"

His face grew more purple still and then, as a tree falls, he fell backward through the window.

An ambulance rushed the fallen magnate to the nearest hospital, but he was pronounced dead—of apoplexy—upon entrance.

But misspelled or not, the eternal stars held their position as of that midnight. The aberrant motion had stopped and again the stars were fixed. Fixed to spell—SNIVELEY'S SOAP!

**I**F THE many explanations offered by all and sundry who professed some physical and astronomical knowledge, none was more lucid—or closer to the actual truth—than that put forward by Wendell Mehan, president emeritus of the New York Astronomical Society.

"Obviously, the phenomenon is a trick of refraction," said Dr. Mehan. "It is manifestly impossible for any force contrived by man to move a star. The stars, therefore, still occupy their old places in the firmament.

"I suggest that Sniveley must have contrived a method of refracting the light of the stars, somewhere in or just above the atmospheric layer of earth, so that they appear to have changed their position. This is done, probably, by radio waves or similar waves, sent on some fixed frequency from a set—or possibly a series of four hundred and sixty-eight sets—somewhere upon the surface of the earth. Although we do not understand just how it is done, it is no more unthinkable that light rays should be bent by a field of waves than by a prism or by gravitational force.

"Since Sniveley was not a great scientist, I imagine that his discovery was empiric rather than logical—an accidental find. It is quite possible that even the discovery of his projector will not enable present-day scientists to understand its secret, any more than an aboriginal savage could understand the operation of a simple radio receiver by taking one apart.

"My principal reason for this assertion is the fact that the refraction obviously is a

fourth-dimensional phenomenon or its effect would be purely local to one portion of the globe. Only in the fourth dimension could light be so refracted. . . ."

**T**HERE was more, but it is better to skip to his final paragraph:

"This effect cannot possibly be permanent—more permanent, that is, than the wave-projector which causes it. Sooner or later, Sniveley's machine will be found and shut off, or will break down or wear out of its own volition. Undoubtedly it includes vacuum tubes, which will some day blow out, as do the tubes in our radios. . . ."

The excellence of Mr. Mehan's analysis was shown, two months and eight days later, when the Boston Electric Co. shut off, for non-payment of bills, service to a house situated at 901 West Rogers Street, ten blocks from the Sniveley mansion. At the instant of the shut-off, excited reports from the night side of Earth brought the news that the stars had flashed back into their former positions, instantaneously.

Investigation brought out that the description of one Elmer Smith, who had purchased that house six months before, corresponded with the description of Rutherford R. Sniveley, and undoubtedly Elmer Smith and Rutherford R. Sniveley were one and the same person.

In the attic was found a complicated network of four hundred and sixty-eight radio-type antennae, each antenna of different length and running in a different direction. The machine to which they were connected was not larger, strangely, than the average ham's radio projector, nor did it draw appreciably more current, according to the electric company's record.

By special order of the President of the United States, the projector was destroyed without examination of its internal arrangement. Clamorous protests against this high-handed executive order arose from many sides. But inasmuch as the projector had already been broken up, the protests were to no avail.

Serious repercussions were, on the whole, amazingly few.

Persons in general appreciated the stars more, but trusted them less.

Roger Phlutter got out of jail and married Elsie. Dr. Milton Hale found he liked Seattle, and stayed there. Two thousand miles away from his sister Agatha, he found it possible

(Concluded on page 66)

# SCIENTIFACTS

INCREIBLE BUT TRUE

## POTENTIAL ENERGY

**M**AN is most prodigal in the wastefulness of his resources. This is due more to his ignorance than to his wantonness. For example, in the development of electrical power, we utilize less than ten per cent of the energy released in the production of electricity.

Electric lamps are less than five per cent efficient. Gasoline engines are only about ten per cent efficient, yet one pound of gasoline contains ten times the potential energy of a pound of guncotton, and three times that of a pound of TNT explosive.

The highest source of potential energy is radium. Radium gives out more than a million, two hundred thousand times the energy of the same weight of coal burned with oxygen. The catch is that the supply of radium is limited and it releases energy but one-eightieth as quickly as coal.

Out of the developments of World War II comes a more efficient gasoline motor which develops two horsepower per pound of weight. It remains for science to crack down on gasoline and release more efficiently its potential energy.

## NEW GERMICIDE

**T**HE latest addition to the newly discovered family of powerful germicides which includes penicillin is a substance known as streptomycin. This preparation, worked on



and developed at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, has proved able to inhibit the growth of several bacterial species which have been more or less immune to the previously known germ-stopping substances extracted from molds and other microorganisms growing in the soil.

Pretty soon we are going to revert to that old adage that everybody should eat a peck of dirt during his lifetime. We are going back to the soil for our latest discoveries.

## PREHISTORIC PRODIGALS

**M**ODERN man is not the first to be guilty of sinful waste by his reckless use of fire. Dr. J. Iverson, Danish scientist, has made extensive researches which go to prove that prehistoric farmers of the Stone Age were good at destruction of forests, even without the use of steel saws and axes.

Dr. Iverson bases his deductions on pollen grains found in successive layers of peat and muck in Danish swamps. In the lower, older layers the pollens were predominantly those of typical forest trees. Higher, at about the level where charcoal layers in ancient hearths indicate the arrival of primitive farmer Neolithic types, he found an abrupt change in the pollen deposits to brushland shrubs and small trees, such as alder, birch and hazel, together with great numbers of common weed pollens—the kind of vegetation that grows on fields that have been cleared of forests, cultivated for a while and then abandoned.

Thus, ancient man destroyed his forests as recklessly as we do today, and without using the felled timber for the myriad purposes to which we put it.

But that doesn't excuse us, so go easy on your forest fires and timbering operations without adequate reforestation.

## GIANT ELECTRIC BRAIN

**I**N THESE columns we have mentioned previously robots and huge calculating machines which do the work of many mathematicians. Comes now the daddy of all such machines.

Pressed into the war service of the U. S. Navy at Harvard University is the greatest calculating machine. This giant brain is built in a steel frame fifty-one feet long and eight feet high. It has five hundred miles of wire with three million connections, thirty-five hundred multiple relays with thirty-five thousand contacts, more than two thousand counters, nearly fifteen hundred tenpole switches, and tiers of seventy-two adding machines, each with twenty-three significant numbers.

Right now this super-mechanical brain does in a few hours a problem that formerly took four expert operators three weeks to do on ordinary office calculators. After the war this machine will go into civilian service, working on myriad problems from the dynamic equations of the solar system to the vibrational stamina of a thread of new plastic filament.

Professor, will you please set up the problem of my neural controls? I think I have a short-circuit in my reflexes.

## BLACKSMITHING IN 1950?

**W**HO doesn't remember the old horse-shoeing shops where the blacksmith cleated iron shoes onto the hoofs of old Dobbin? And who hasn't heard about electroplating by now? But who on earth would ever have thought of combining the two processes—on a human being? Answer: the U. S. War Department.

Leathernecks and sailors are now getting copperplated feet to stop athlete's foot in the South Pacific. The patient's feet are placed in a copper sulphate solution which contains a copper plate. Copper bands, soaked in salt water, are fastened around the ankles, and six-volt storage-battery juice is turned on.

The treatment takes about six minutes and is repeated daily for a week. Copper particles adhere to the soles of the feet—to be worn off—although there is no discoloration or discomfort. The result is a cure of athlete's foot.

Doctor, will you apply the anode and cathode to the old iron man for about twenty minutes? He is beginning to surface-rust. Or can these spots be freckles?

## MIRACLE METAL, NO. R-301

**S**OME time ago we took cognizance of the development of aluminum and then of magnesium. Now there appears a new aluminum alloy called R-301. R-301 is right now going altogether into plane construction, its use making it possible to take five tons of metal weight off of heavy bombers. This will allow a bomb load increase of ten thousand pounds, or more fuel for longer range, or more guns. And all this without reducing the strength of the ship.

R-301 is as strong as ordinary steel, and so tough as actually to stop armor-piercing bullets more effectively than steel.

For many years scientists have striven to produce an aluminum alloy with these qualities, but, while they got certain results, the new alloys were always less resistant to corrosion.

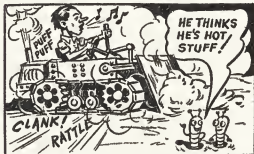
Now Thomas L. Fritzlen, metallurgist, has come forward with the new miracle metal which has all the qualities desired and which is also corrosion resistant. This was brought about by making two new alloys at the same time—an alloy for durable quality and lighter

of weight, plus a coating alloy resistant to corrosion. In plain words, Mr. Fritzlen has produced an alloy coated with another alloy, a heretofore impossible accomplishment.

Processes are already being worked out to produce colored aluminum for civilian purposes and uses after the war. Look out, plastics, you may have a strong post-war rival!

## BACTERIA

**T**HE most numerous of all living things not domesticated and most beneficial to man is, of all things, the common earthworm. This burrowing creature does more for the soil and in working the soil than all man-



made implements combined. But the lowly earthworm as wide-spread and numerous as it is, does not begin to cover the subject of life in a fragment of earth.

There are billions of independent entities in every cubic inch of dirt upon this old world. Man's entire existence is dependent on these infinitesimal atoms we know as bacteria. The entire cycle of life and death functions on this tiny mote of life.

Microbes of the soil have been rather extensively studied. For instance, in one gram of good soil there are approximately 75,000,000 living bacteria of various kinds, 100,000 molds or spores, 200,000 protozoa, and 100,000 algae.

One gram of soil is less than one twenty-fifth of an ounce.

## SOLAR ENERGY

**B**EFORE we take the subject of potential energy this month, let us consider the greatest possible source of energy for the future. After all the coal and gas and oil and timber have been exhausted, man must find new sources of energy or perish. At least, civilization will collapse as such.

One source of energy, beyond that of power derived from waterfalls, is the steady and regular rhythm of the tides. If man can harness the tides of the sea, he can be assured of regular power until the world ceases to revolve on its axis. But there is one far greater source of energy which has yet to be directly tapped by man. This is the radiation of the sun.

True, we have experimented with burning mirrors and other weak methods of utilizing solar heat, but no first-class solution has yet come forth. And yet the sun, prime giver of life and energy, has not been harnessed.

In the burning of its atoms at its core, the sun develops temperatures of possibly forty million degrees Fahrenheit. It has been calcu-

lated that the sun burns up more than 150 billion tons of its substance per hour.

Of all this tremendous heat and energy radiated out into space the earth receives only a fraction. However, this fraction amounts, all over the earth, to the equivalent of 450 trillion horsepower.



lated that the sun burns up more than 150 billion tons of its substance per hour.

Thus, the amount of sun energy pouring down on a small roof would, if utilized properly, supply more than enough power to run all the electric and heating equipment in that house!

Mama, lend me your hand-mirror; I'm going up on the roof and tap enough sunshine to operate my electric shaver.

Mama, lend me your hand-mirror; I'm going up on the roof and tap enough sunshine to operate my electric shaver.

## BATTLE OF THE FIBERS

**T**HE latest report on vegetable fibers comes from research men at the Delta Experimental Station of Mississippi where they have succeeded in growing cotton already colored by nature's own dyes.

Color-fast lints in several primary colors—red, green, blue, and in browns and khaki—have already been announced. Some of this pre-manufactured colored cotton is being hand-processed and made into yarn for further experimental work.

Rayon has come heavily to the front since

the loss of silk importation and the diversion of nylon and other synthetic fibers to war needs. Wool combines with cotton or rayon, cotton with rayon or silk, and rayon with silk and nylon. Natural fibers compete with synthetic fibers, and synthetic fibers contend avidly with each other. Chemical treatment of fibers promises to have a profound effect on the post-war textile industry.

The Monsanto Chemical Company has announced certain accomplishments already completed, including treatment of wool so it won't shrink, treatment of both cotton and rayon to double the wearing quality, treatment of serges to eliminate the shine of wear, treatment of fibers so they will not slip or run, etc.

Tailor, will you please make up my next suit from the processed wool with the built-in pants press?

## THIS MONTH'S GIANT AND DWARF

**WE** COME now to this month's large and small comparison from the workshop of Mother Nature. Today's lesson will treat of flowers.

The world's largest flower is known as the *Amorphophallus*. This plant grows in the damp forest regions of Java and Sumatra. It has practically no stem, and when fully opened, the gigantic blossom frequently attains a height of fifteen feet and a diameter of eight feet. The blossom looks like a Jack-in-the-pulpit without the pulpit over Jack's head.

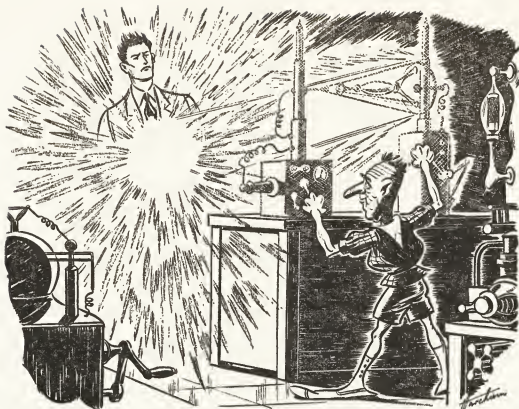
You can find color plates on this enormous flower by consulting the *National Geographic Magazine*.

In contrast, the world's smallest known flower is the duckweed, scientifically known as the *Wolffia*. It is no larger than the point of a pin, of a yellowish-green color, and is found in Eastern and Central United States where it grows in great quantities on the surface of quiet waters. In such masses they serve as food for wild ducks.

You folks watch the ducks wolfing the *Wolffia*; I'm ordering an *Amorphophallus* for my best girl to wear in her hair. She always did like showy flowers.

## More SCIENTIFACTS Coming Next Issue!

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, OF *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*, published quarterly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1934, State of New York, County of New York, SS. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid personally appeared H. L. Herbert, who, having been duly sworn according to law, depose and say that he is the Business Manager of *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 321, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form. To wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, Standard Magazines, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, Harvey Burns, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, H. L. Herbert, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Standard Magazines, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, certain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as holders, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds or other securities than as so stated by him. H. L. HERBERT, Business Manager, Sworn to and subscribed before me this 3rd day of October, 1934. Eugene Wechsler, My commission expires March 30th, 1935.



When Prince Fuj flipped the switch, things happened to me

# STOP, THIEF!

A Prize-Winning Amateur Contest Story

By FOX E. HOLDEN

*From a distant galaxy comes Crown Prince Fuj, seeking new worlds to conquer—and finds something more than he bargained for!*

**N**OTHING, probably, would have happened at all if it hadn't been that I was angry at Professor Sanders. He said something in class that I just didn't agree with, and so I decided not to go home for Christmas vacation, but to stay at the University and do some research to disprove the old buzzard. He said that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

Sheer nonsense.

I made Sanders admit that there are more ways than one to write music, to paint, and, in general, to do almost anything. But he wouldn't admit that there were other ways of doing geometry beside the Euclidean method. Not that I am a non-conformist. I

just don't like a one-track mind.

It was just after the third day of pretty fruitless book-worming when I met the Little fellow. I wasn't, frankly, in any mood to meet or notice anybody, but you just don't calmly pass up something that looks like a run-away from a side-show. Anybody'd stare. I stared.

Cute little man. About four and a half feet tall with a funny, wrinkled face, a nose that would have turned Cyrano de Bergerac green, and feet that served him just as well as snow-shoes. Checkered-silk shirt. Khaki shorts. High-button shoes. No overcoat.

"Well?" he said.

"Ah—hello! I, er—I'm sorry."

"Can I help it if I haven't had a chance to

get any clothes like you're wearing? Stop staring and come here a minute!"

I walked over to him. Cautiously.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"My name's Fuj. Crown Prince Fuj is all. Just came from Krolix. What I want—"

"From where?"

"Krolix. That's the name of the solar system where I live. Further than that I won't tell. It's a royal secret."

"Oh." I began computing the reward the State Insane Asylum offered for the return of one of these. I wondered if I would get a bonus or anything. Then I wondered how much resistance he'd be able to put up. "How did you get here?"

"Warped."

"You're not kiddin', chum."

"I had a confederate—in camerâ, you understand—at the controls of the master-machine on my planet. I was—well, projected, you might say."

**M**Y LIPS formed another round O.

"I know you distrust me. You even think I'm speaking your language. I'm using telepathy, of course. That's how I know you not only distrust me, but you're all confused. What's more, if you'll help me, I'll help you. A deal?"

I hate wise-guys. A lunatic or not, I decided to call his bluff. "All right, I do distrust you. But if you're so good, tell me what I'm confused about. Go on—go ahead."

"You are completely baffled about the simplest concept in geometry—the straight line. You're really quite stupid. Anybody knows that the shortest distance between two points is a warped line."

"It is?"

"Yes. And now, I'd like you to get me into the Physics lab."

"I suppose I should humor you, Fudgy, but the place is locked up during vacation. So hadn't you better just come with me? Some place where we can talk."

"You know where you can get a key. Don't lie."

It was about then that I began to wonder about my own mental well-being. How did he know what I was mixed up about? How did he know that I could get a key from the head-janitor? And as a matter of fact, why didn't his mouth move when he talked?

Mother always told me I was too impulsive. The next thing I knew, this nutty little apparition was slogging along beside me in the snow toward the gymnasium where the

head-janitor usually potted around while earning his money. Then to the Physics lab. Don't ask me why I did it. I don't know.

"Now, what and who ARE you, and what nut-house do you come from?" I said as I locked the door of the big laboratory after us. "This, little chum, has gone far enough. I am in a bad mood to-day."

The Little fellow straightened up to his full four feet seven, and almost murdered me with a look.

"I suppose you think I'm in a good mood! I'm almost bankrupt. In case you didn't know, Krolix is run on a plan of government known as Autocratic Plutocracy. Everybody with money is an absolute ruler, and the person with most money rules everybody. That's why I'm here."

He didn't explain further—just worked like the devil for the next few minutes. I watched Fuj as he took a bunch of gadgets from a large hip-pocket. He started hooking them together with fine wire. One was a translucent cone about five inches high made of some sort of plastic, I think, and he was hitching it between two long, upright rods that were about two feet tall. They were the telescoping variety. Next there was a small control-board that resembled an expensive radio console when he was through assembling it, and finally a bunch of things I can't describe. I can't describe them because they—they—faded!

"How—uh, rich are you?" I asked finally.

"Was I, you mean. You see, wealth, in Krolix, is real estate. The more planets you own the wealthier you are. Before the crash a century ago I was doing great. But I invested too many planets—bum tip-off—and you know how those things go. All I had left when the Exchange got through with me were about three good-sized worlds and a bunch of barren rocks."

"Oh," I exclaimed. He looked as though he had almost finished the assembly. He messed around with all the instruments he could find in the lab, and finally looked satisfied.

"This is going to work fine," he said.

"That's good. All I want to know is what this has to do with your poverty."

"Well, I don't think I should trust you. If it weren't such a clever idea, I wouldn't, but I've got to tell it to somebody. You see, I need at least one more good-sized, young planet to get back on my feet again. So I'm going to take this one."

"What?"

"Sure. I'm going to warp it into Krolix.



As I told you, the shortest distance between two points is a warped line."

"Thank the stars it isn't straight!"

"A dimensionally warped line has a distance, or length, of zero."

"Zero what?"

"Just zero. Zero anything. When you travel the line it takes zero."

"Zero time?"

"I guess so. Isn't it a brilliant idea? Now my portable machine is all set up, so here goes."

"But only one line of shortest distance can exist between two points."

"There you go again with that straight line stuff. I told you, I'm using a dimensionally warped line. You're just dumb." I didn't admit that, either. "As I said, I'll trade. I have lots of worthless rocks to choose from. I'll warp one of 'em into this planet's position as I warp this planet into Krolix. Same mass and everything."

"But you can't do that. Two objects cannot exist in the same space at the same time."

## Meet the Author of This Story



FOX B. HOLDEN  
Pvt. 1st Class, AAF

AS SOON as I finish this my typewriter goes in the garage with the car and they can keep each other company for the duration. I think that reasons for such drastic action are rather evident from the photo. Do I look too much like Frankenstein?

But to begin as far back as I dare—and am I glad I never kept a diary!—let me just say that I have lead a relatively normal, confused, chaotic, Holden-like life.

I began fiction-writing a year ago when I was a sophomore in Middlebury College. I think Fuj was a freshman that year—I'll never forget when he was my room-mate, though perhaps Fuj wasn't his real name. Yes, all names and events in STOP, THIEF! are fictitious.

This year my stuff began to bear a little fruit. But the Army hasn't given the groove I'm in a chance to turn into my usual rut. That's

another good thing about Uncle Sam.

But aside from being under the few minor restrictions of a buck-private, I'm as free as the wind. As free as I want to be, anyway, because I have a sweetheart—I hope. At least I've been trying to persuade her of that for a long time.

I like to write this kind of material more than any other type of fiction, you know, because I like the THRILLING WONDER of it all. I was never good at science, or at straight fiction. So I combined them.

In my twenty years of life—beard tangled with the platin again—I have also done other things, but this is a thumb-nail autobiography, not a confession. Yet I will admit having two small sisters, for as far as my writing and plotting goes, credit belongs where credit is due. I always told the folks that another year in kindergarten would have done me lots of good.

That's all I have time to write now. This soldier has to be on hand just in case Crown Prince Fuj got lost.

—FOX B. HOLDEN

REACHING out, I grabbed him by the arm and held on with all my might.

"HOLD IT! You'll throw this entire Solar System into chaos. You'll upset the whole business, you little idiot." I knew it was stupid even to surmise that he knew what he was talking about, but when a guy points a gun in your face you don't stop to consider whether it's a toy or not. You suddenly get very pessimistic on general principles.

"That is right, isn't it? Well, I'll trade, then. I can use two lines of travel between the two points."

"You just don't understand zero. Both bodies will be in transit, if you want to call it that, at the same time. Neither will be wholly here nor there at the same time, although they will be in each other's places at the same time—transit instantaneous. It's all in your interpretation of zero—you've been conditioned and taught in a very limited conception of it, I see."

"Bosh!"

"Oh. You don't believe me. I'll show you."

Before I could stop the little nut, he had pressed a bank of buttons. There wasn't

any noise. Just crazy lights. Then I had the feeling of being—pulled—in all directions at the same time.

Next, I was standing in front of an oncoming subway train. I was falling through space with the ground thousands of feet below. I was gasping for breath in the middle of a big red desert—I saw ruined cities in the distance. I was being sucked down in a bog and snapped at by monsters that had never inhabited Earth. I was playing tag with the Asteroids. I was in the middle of a Hollywood movie set.

Then I was back in the lab. I was a mess. That's how I knew it had all been real and not hypnosis or something.

"Had to get you back. But there it is—point-to-point-to-point etcetera. Faster than light, of course, so you didn't travel. You were projected."

"How long was I gone?"

"Maybe ten seconds. I had to give you enough time at each place so that you could see that you were some place. Well, now you're convinced?"

I was. You'd've been, too.

"You little crook!" Gosh, I felt peeved. I had been responsible for getting him in here. I could see myself getting bounced from the University so fast it would make me dizzy all over again.

"Please don't say that. It hurts. You people will never know the difference. And I'm trading, anyway."

"Awfully shrewd bargain."

"Well, I don't know." A pout came over Fuj's little face. He really looked as though I'd hit him. "First you told me I was crazy," he sobbed. "Now I'm a crook!"

"There, there, old man, what am I doing? Look here!" I had an idea! Now if I could only work it!

"Fuj, old sock, don't feel so bad."

"Yes?" He was sobbing. I wiped his nose and eyes with a piece of filter-paper.

"I know where you can get something really nice." He brightened immediately. "Here is a really good trade. You see, the people of Earth really like the good old Solar System. Leaving it would just break their hearts, Fuj. You wouldn't want to be mean?"

"Well, no-o-ooo. But I'm so poor."

"Suppose you got a nice piece of land—not nearly as big as Earth, but with little people on it that would make perfect puppets. You could move them about and do whatever you'd like with them. They'd love it. And you'd have fun."

"You mean I could have land with a command? That kind is worth just fifty-seven point two times as much, not counting insurance."

"Sure, sure. Now look. I want you to go to this place to do the job, because there's lots of water around it. You'll have to watch yourself and make preliminary investigations. I don't want any tidal waves, so all the land you take must be substituted by an equal weight of water." He was beaming.

"Water? Easy. But you understand, I'll have actually to travel there—can't warp. Can't carry the machine all assembled with me. So, how do I get there, and how do I recognize the place?"

"Well, it's a big island, about eleven-thousand miles due west of New York City, on the fortieth degree parallel. It's long and narrow, and there are lots of little yellow people who have buck teeth living on it."

So I sent him on his way yesterday. He may get lost. If you see him around, just give him a few directions, will you?

And now for Prof. Sanders!

## PI IN THE SKY

(Concluded from page 59)

for the first time to defy her openly. He enjoys life more but, it is feared, will write fewer books.

There is one fact remaining which is painful to consider, since it casts a deep reflection upon the basic intelligence of the human race. It is proof, though, that the President's

executive order was justified, despite scientific protest.

That fact is as humiliating as it is enlightening. During the two months and eight days during which the Sniveley machine was in operation, sales of Sniveley Soap increased 915%!

**BUY WAR STAMPS AND BONDS EVERY PAY DAY!**



# WONDERS OF WAR

## The Role of Science in Combat on All Fronts



**BRITISH "CROCODILE" THROWS FLAME**  
450 FEET—The secret 41-ton "Crocodile" flame thrower that shoots a geyser of fire over 450 feet to produce fierce and persistent flame in the nooks and crannies of pillboxes and trenches has been recently revealed by the British Army staff.

The new flame thrower is fitted to a standard Churchill tank with a controlled, armored fuel-carrying trailer hitched on behind. The trailer can be jettisoned if necessary. The "Crocodile" uses a special new type of fuel, shooting a flame spray through a powerful gun that can be adjusted for firing around corners. It does not interfere with existing armament.

**NEW NAVY FIRE EXTINGUISHER HAS SOY-BEAN BASE**—A new liquid foam fire extinguisher for combating fires at sea has a special nozzle attachment where the foaming charge of soy-bean meal or other protein base is mixed with a foaming agent and water by action that is basically mechanical rather than chemical, to produce a fire-smothering blanket.

The new foam extinguisher, perfected by the Bureau of Ships, Navy Department, is more fluid and therefore flows around and over objects better. It will retain its consistency for more than two hours. It eliminates danger to property and fire-fighter alike, by reducing the hazard of re-ignition and flashback, which occurs when flames retrace their path.

**SELF-PROPELLED BRIDGE ON TREADS**—

A self-moving bridge mounted on tractor treads that can travel overland in sections is the invention of John C. Savage of New York City. Two tank-like vehicles, tread-mounted, for the abutments against the banks of the stream to be spanned. They are connected by interlocking steel girders that form the span itself. Hollow chambers of tanks in the bodies of the tractors can be flooded with water to seat the vehicles firmly on the stream bed.

**RECENTLY PATENTED PLANE COMBINES PROPELLERS AND JET PROPULSION**—

An airplane combining the advantages of conventional propellers and jet propulsion has been patented by Captain Homer A. Boushey of the AAF. Jet-propelled craft suffer from wasteful use of fuel in getting off the ground and at low altitudes, performing better in the thin air of the stratosphere. Accordingly, Captain Boushey has so constructed his jet-propulsion device that it functions as a gas tur-

bine at take-off and as long thereafter as the pilot wishes, can then be switched over to direct use of the jet.

**WHIRLING LIGHTS TO DAZZLE BOMBARDIERS**—A novel scheme for protecting airfields, industrial areas, docks and other major targets against night-bombing raids has been devised by Army officers Lieutenant Colonel J. H. Church and Major E. A. Rues-tow. Instead of having their target black out in darkness flares can penetrate, they propose to make it too bright to see.

They propose use of high towers carrying rapidly whirling searchlights, covering the whole area with an impenetrable blaze of dazzling light. To blind enemy bombardiers still more effectively, the system also uses mirrors, stationary or rotating, in suitable positions. These would reflect the stabbing beams upward at confusing angles.

**TANK TREAD INVENTED BY CANADIAN**—

Joseph A. Bombardier is the warlike name of an inventor in Valcourt, Quebec, who has recently patented a new design for the wheels carrying the tread of a tank or other tractor-mounted vehicle. The two-wheel trucks are coupled in pairs by means of strong springs, thus maintaining an even alignment through tension and preventing excessive tilting.

**WATER TRAPS TEST BULLETS**—A novel trap for flying bullets has been discovered by Irving R. Gilson of Liverpool, New York, intended to replace the sand traps now used as bullet stops where test firing is conducted. Sand, according to the inventor, is unsatisfactory for the purpose. It fills that air with silica flour which is a menace to workers' health and lowers the scrap value of spent bullets.

The new device consists of a long tube into which jets of water are shot at an angle, forming a bubble-filled cushion the length of the pipe. When the bullets are fired into this, they are slowed down and stopped without damage or dust.

**SANDWICH FABRICS BAR POISON GAS**—

A new system of sandwiched multiple-layer fabrics, the middle layers of which consist of rubber and other plastic materials with poison-gas-excluding properties, has been invented by R. A. Sebastian and H. A. Scruton, civilian chemists employed by the Chemical Warfare Service.



Vedalia Crown was curled up on the divan, coolly smoking a cigarette of Jovian tobacco

# I GET OFF HERE

By FORD SMITH

*Dr. Devore Ragon, Head of the Solar Observance System Detective Agency, Solves the Teleportation Kidnaping of Lovely Vedalia Crown!*

**T**HE room was a circular chamber with all the dainty appurtenances of a lady's boudoir of the Twenty-second Century. There were no windows for the upper wall was of silicoplast, which served to conduct curving curtains of soft light from the generating source around the base of the room within the wall. A button-studded panel controlled the amount of sunlight admitted or kept out.

On the bed lay a young woman, clad in diaphanous material. She lay curled there like a kitten, her shoulder length red-gold hair forming a tousled frame about her

piquant face. Her weight scarcely dented the rubber-foam mattress, thanks to the gravity-repellent charge which nullified ninety-tenths of her mass.

The light sound of her breathing was interrupted by a soft click, sufficient and alien enough to arouse the sleeper. Vedalia Crown started faintly, stirred and opened her gentian blue eyes.

She sat up, rubbing sleep from her eyes. For a strange thing was happening. The weaving curtain of moonlight was growing dim—being sucked through the west wall as a ventilator fan sucks smoke from a chamber,

It was more than uncanny. It was a fantastic nightmare—a state of subconscious chaos that people were no longer aware of, thanks to the Benson psycho treatments. Vedralia had been psyched. She knew she was not dreaming. At the same time, she knew that light vibrations could not be sucked out of a room like smoke—and through a solid wall!

Swiftly, she reached out for the control panel, and pressed button after button. Nothing happened. Utter darkness remained. She switched on the three-dimensional news screen in the wall opposite the foot of her bed. Again nothing.

Alarmed, she felt blindly for the televis hand-set on the bedside table, deciding to summon aid from other quarters of the Crown apartments. The line was dead and the tiny screen failed to light up.

She was completely cut off from the rest of the world!

**P**ANIC was laying its icy hand upon her when a voice spoke aloud through the blackness. It was a man's voice, a soft, cultured baritone.

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Crown. You are simply experiencing the effect of the ultra-gamma light beam."

"Who are you?" the girl demanded. "How did you get into my apartment?"

"My name means nothing to you, and I am not in your bedroom. You may call me Mr. Hermes."

"Where are you? You sound within ten feet of me."

"We are separated physically by great distance, but for conversational purposes, you and I are together in an isolated section of space the size and shape of your charming bedchamber."

"I'll scream," the girl said, staring at the empty blackness.

"Why not?" Mr. Hermes answered indifferently. "No one will hear you but I."

"I won't scream," she decided, fighting for self-control. "What do you want?"

"That's better. You aren't the least bit curious about the ultra-gamma beam which cuts off all outside contact?" He sounded disappointed.

Vedralia Crown thought rapidly. This ultra-gamma ray, whatever it was, cut off all outside contact. But the beam didn't damp out any electric power within its radius of influence. Or did it? She moved slightly, felt a thrill of hope. Her weight on the bed still remained at one-tenth gravity, thanks

to the battery-charged gravity unit built in its base.

This meant that the autovox should work. The autovox was the Twenty-second Century's development of the dictograph. It recorded all sound within the radius of its sensitive microphone and, on a secondary cylinder, recorded all conscious thought directed through a mind disk when the latter was held against its operator's forehead.

Stealthily, Vedralia groped for the tuggle-switch of the autovox. Her strange visitor apparently couldn't see in the darkness, either. Coughing loudly to cover the noise of the clicking switch, she clamped the slim metal disk to her forehead and began to think as calmly as she could.

"Yes," she said aloud. "I'm curious, but I don't understand."

"You wouldn't," answered Mr. Hermes condescendingly. "Your father educated you in the social economics, with extra attention to the ramifications of the great Crown Interplanetary Newscaster Service. You would know nothing of the higher mathematics of electrical energy. The ultra-gamma beam operates on a frequency of two hundred quintillion and a wave length of approximately one-billionth centimeter—more than twenty octaves above the frequency of visible light rays."

Vedralia Crown thought these incomprehensible terms into the autovox, not knowing whether the primary cylinder had picked up Mr. Hermes' words.

"Which means?" she asked gropingly.

"That I am working in a field of frequencies and wave lengths above that at which atomic nuclei disintegrate—higher than any man has ever gone before. It has enabled me to reach you through all the safeguards with which the doting J. Harvard Crown has surrounded you."

"But what do you want of me?" she demanded desperately.

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Hermes. "Your father is an enterprising man, Miss Crown, although an extremely short-sighted one. Are you familiar at all with the details of the Arthur Sturgeon case?"

Vedralia Crown's eyes went wider in the darkness.

"You mean the disappearance of the roving telecast reporter—that Sturgeon?"

"None other. Arthur Sturgeon stumbled upon something he had no right to know that day in Mars City Two—something which would have caused disaster if put on the interplanetary telecast beam. Fortun-

ately, he did not have his telecast equipment with him at the time. Unfortunately, he did have his micro-recording apparatus along and recorded information which he mailed by rocket ship to J. Harvard Crown before he was—er—apprehended.

"Your father must not reveal its contents to a single person. He must make no copies. And I must have the original back in my hands before tomorrow night, Earth time. It is through you that I expect to exert my will on your illustrious and news-minded parent.

"He is to deliver Sturgeon's micro-cast to your chamber by eighteen o'clock tomorrow with registry seal unbroken and contents intact."

Vedalia marshaled her thoughts. "In exchange for—for what?" she asked unsteadily. "In exchange for you, my dear," mocked Mr. Hermes. "Now, if you have reported all this information on your autovox, shall we be going? Or must we go over the matter again?"

Vedalia Crown gasped. How could he have known? Did he wear some sort of lenses which enabled him to see through blackness?

"Answer me, Miss Crown." His voice was impatient.

"I recorded it," she answered faintly.

"Excellent. We get off here."

Before Vedalia could move, she became aware of a physical contraction of the bullet-shaped area of blackness. Gradually the light returned, and the silicoplast wall ran riot with colors. The tele-audio came to life, began babbling news of a spacemen's riot at Moon Station Ten while the televis unit glowed pulsingly on the house hand-set on the bedside table. The autovox continued to record soundlessly, the cord of the thought disk trailing from machine to the disk on the bed.

But Vedalia Crown had vanished as completely as though she had never been!

**D**EVORE RAGON, doctor of science, was a well set-up chap of the Type C class on the threshold of his thirties. He was young to be the head of an organization as powerful and unique as the Solar Observance System.

Solar Observance System occupied the top two floors of the Sol Building in New Washington. The centermost room was a circular affair, more like a rotunda than the heart of the most famous detective agency of the Twenty-second Century. The dome was made entirely of silicoplast which was impervious

to weather and light alike. It had the traditional feature of vibro-shielding which made it possible to shut off the room from all prying and peeking inventions of man.

Dr. Devore Ragon waited at the fiftieth or private helicop level for a pneumatic car to shoot him up to the SOS offices, forty-nine floors above. He glanced with casual disinterest at the three-dimensional telecast audio about which a small crowd of office workers were clustered to see and hear the latest interplanetary news as they awaited pneumatic lifts.

Dr. Ragon wasn't interested. He had already enjoyed a pre-view of these re-cast items on his private tele-audio along with his breakfast. He turned and pressed the signal button of lift number seven, one of the battery of twelve cages which ascended all the way to the top floors.

Thus, he was the only person who saw exactly what happened.

The red neon signal indicating the downward approach of a pneumatic car in number five shaft glowed. There was the gentle sigh of an air-cushioned stop, and the bronze doors of number five parted silently. A man stepped out. His head was turned as he spoke over his shoulder.

"Thank you," he said politely. "I get off here."

He nearly bumped into Devore Ragon, recovered himself in time, and tipped his plastic helmet with an air of Nineteenth Century courtesy.

"Pardon me," he said, and stepped around Ragon to the helicop landing platform to signal for a taxi plane.

Ragon stared briefly after him, memorizing his every external detail. Then he whirled back toward the closing lift doors. With a swift lunge Ragon caught and held them apart.

Something was crazy here. The polite stranger had spoken as though addressing an elevator operator. Yet the pneumatic lifts were self-operating and there was no pneumatic cage in sight!

The courteous stranger had stepped out of empty space!

Devore Ragon drew back, and the number five doors slid silently together. The green neon of the ascending number seven lift glowed, and various persons came over from the tele-audio.

"Did you see that?" Ragon asked the first, a florid-faced man with a double chin. "Did you see the man who just went out on the landing platform?"



"Did he drop something?"

"He did," agreed Ragon cryptically. "He dropped a fundamental law of physics and smashed it into atoms."

"I beg pardon?" said florid-face.

He was an import broker who was only interested in the rising or falling of prices on the Venusian tarpox crop.

"Granted," said Ragon, entering the lift and punching the ninety-ninth button. He shook his head impatiently to clear it of the annoying problem. The nullification of gravity had, to a great extent, been accomplished. Witness the anti-gravity units installed in the framework of beds to insure more comfortable sleeping.

But nobody had yet found out how to carry an operable five-hundred-pound unit around with him. And nobody popped out of an empty pneumatic shaft, conversing with an imaginary elevator operator!

Obviously, Dr. Ragon was sick and seeing things. He was sicker when he got to his private office. Before he had time to settle himself, the signal flashed on his televis set.

"Mr. Crown has been calling you for thirty minutes, Dr. Ragon," his secretary announced. "He seems to be frantic."

Ragon waved his assistant away and flipped the switch. The head and shoulders of J. Harvard Crown appeared in the panel.

"Yes?" said Ragon. "Good morning, Mr. Crown."

"Good nothing!" roared the head of Interplanetary News. "Where have you been, Ragon? I've been trying to contact you for the past hour."

"Thirty minutes," corrected Ragon precisely. "I was en route from home. What is it? Not Vedralia again, I hope."

"She's vanished! Not a trace, but all the gadgets running wild in her bathroom."

"Where are you now?"

"In Vedralia's room," snorted J. Harvard Crown.

"Stay there!" ordered Ragon crisply, "I'll be right over. And don't touch anything else."

**F**IFTEEN minutes later, Dr. Ragon faced the highly aroused telecast head across Vedralia's bed. An imposing-looking man Crown had a mane of iron-gray hair, steel-gray eyes, and jutting blue-gray depilated chin. J. Harvard Crown would never submit to the hair hormone treatments to control the growth of hair. He thought it was silly, and continued to use the old-fashioned depilatory shave.

Ragon, with his smooth, hairless cheeks and wavy black hair, looked almost boyish beside the older man.

"You're probably to blame," stormed Crown. "Ever since my daughter invested her personal fortune in your observance agency, I've been afraid of something like this."

Ragon winced.

"You seemed quite pleased with the idea. You said it would tie up closely with your telecast system. And if I've tried once I've tried a hundred times to buy Miss Crown's interest out. It was to have been a silent partnership, you know. And has Miss Vedralia Crown kept even the letter of the agreement? She has not! But you know your daughter better than I. What happened here? Was Vedralia at home last night?"

"Certainly! She vanished during the night. There isn't a sign of a struggle—but she's gone, and all this stuff going full blast!"

He flung one arm around expressively, indicating the rioting wall lights, the babbling tele-audio, and the autovox thought disk.

"It's like a nightmare!" he exclaimed.

"A subconscious state that you thoroughly understand, I have no doubt," agreed Ragon.

"You haven't been psyched for that, either."

"I haven't been anything!" bellowed J. Harvard Crown. "I don't believe in ultra-modern inventions. I want you to find my daughter!"

"Yet you managed to build an interplanetary empire on 'ultra-modern inventions.' Did you touch this autovox?"

"I did not," snapped the head of Interplanetary News.

"It's running," observed Ragon, adjusting it to play back from the beginning.

He and Crown stared at each other as the speaker attachment repeated verbatim the strange conversation between Vedralia and the disembodied voice. At its conclusion, Ragon started imperceptibly. The voice said something that rang a tiny bell in his mind—"We get off here."

Snatching up the thought disk, he pressed it to his temple, starting the secondary cylinder for a play-back.

"Dee, darling," the intensity of the thought image bespoke the acute distress of the thinker. "I know you will find this record. I'm trying to be calm, but I'm terribly afraid. Something impossible is happening . . . Mr. Hermes sucked all the light out of the room, I don't understand this tight beam of ultragamma rays . . . (the figures followed),

"About Arthur Sturgeon's disappearance—Dad said to keep it quiet . . . I don't know anything about a micro-cast sent to Dad . . . Mr. Hermes intends to abduct me somehow . . . I'll try to think of some way of communicating with you . . . I know how capable you are, and—"

That was all. Vedula Crown had vanished. His fingers trembling, Ragon handed the thought disk to Crown and re-set the player. J. Harvard Crown pressed the disk against his temple, stood there unmoving until the recorder reached the end of the recorded thought.

"Who the space vortex is Dee?" he demanded.

Ragon blushed.

"At times Miss Crown annoyed me by using that nickname. My give name is Devore. But do you get anything informative out of the record?"

"Only that my daughter seems to be in love with you," snorted Crown.

Ragon shuddered.

"You are mistaken. That was due to stress. Actually we clash violently. But this is no time to discuss psychopathic tastes. What about this Arthur Sturgeon case?"

"The blundering fool uncovered some political intrigue on Mars, I suppose. The Mars central office notified me a week ago that he had dropped out of sight. I didn't know any more until Sturgeon's micro-cast was delivered to me yesterday afternoon."

"What had he recorded?"

"I haven't opened it yet. A note with it said not to for ten days. But I want to know what's happened to my daughter."

"So do I," said Ragon, frowning intently.

"I think I know what happened to her, but I don't know why, and I don't know where she is. Perhaps that micro-cast from Sturgeon will give us a clue."

"What happened to her, then?"

"If this Mr. Hermes—a name chosen, by the way, from Greek mythology to represent the messenger of the gods, a Hermes as fast as light—has really been able to harness ultra-gamma rays beyond the disintegration of the atom, he has learned the secret of teleportation."

"Meaning what?" demanded Crown.

"Meaning that he can dematerialize matter and transport it with the speed of light from one place to another where he re-assembles it."

"Why, that's ridiculous!"

"You'd better pray," said Ragon tersely.

"For, if it is, your daughter's atoms are scattered from here to eternity. Because Hermes certainly dematerialized her right here in this room last night."

**T**HE head of Interplanetary News paled, and there was dread lurking in his sharp eyes.

"What can we do?" he asked distraughtly.

"The first thing we can do is examine that micro-cast."

"Is that wise?" asked Crown. "Nothing a telecast reporter could send me is as important as my daughter's safety."

"Or so you think," said Ragon. "We have about nine hours left. To ease your mind, let me tell you that SOS has ways of examining the contents of telecast records without opening sealed packages. This is a little development of Dr. James Arnold's and mine."

"Arnold? The electric radiation wizard?"

"Yes. A number of scientific instruments employed by SOS are results of our private research. Get the package quickly. I promise you I won't affect it in any way. If worst comes to worst, you can still comply with the terms of Mr. Hermes."

Arrived at the agency offices, Ragon placed the package from the vanished Sturgeon on the plate of a complicated machine which faintly resembled the archaic diathermy apparatus. He adjusted controls and hooked up a subsidiary recording machine while the older man watched anxiously. Then he pressed a switch, and soft violet light focused on the foot-square package from Mars.

"This instrument is called the A-R Detec-tograph," Ragon explained. "It is the only one in existence. First, we learn the nature of the contents of Sturgeon's shipment—whether visual pictures, voice recording or what—and then we transcribe a copy or duplicate record."

"That's great," exclaimed J. Harvard Crown, professional interest sweeping aside all other emotions. "Interplanetary News could use a thousand of these instruments, Ragon."

"You don't get them," said Ragon coolly.

"There's little enough privacy in the System now." He peered through a bi-focal eyepiece into the machine.

"There's one small reel of micro-pictures and one cylinder of camera phonetic recording here. Just a minute and we'll have duplicates."

The subsidiary machine came to life, be-

gan whirring and clicking. After a few moments, Ragon nodded and cut off the power. Uncoupling the second machine, he rolled it over toward his horseshoe desk, focused the projector lens at a small screen and set the cylinder mike for a vocal play-back.

Crown glanced at the original package still reposing on the plate of the primary machine, still sealed and unharmed, and he sat down. Ragon darkened the curtain light, and both men leaned forward to watch the screen.

They saw the interior of a typical Martian room with walls of stellakite and Gartula tapestry. The angle of the picture indicated that the cameraman had shot it from a high spot in the room—doubtless from the grilled mouth of a ventilator shaft.

Two men were in the chamber, both humans. Oddly, Ragon and Crown each recognized both men, one by name and the other by sight.

"Dr. James Arnold!" exclaimed Crown. "And Martin of Inter-spaceways!"

"Arnold," concurred Ragon, tensely, "and the man who defies gravity."

"Dr. Arnold," said the voice of the man Crown had named as Martin, "I regret the necessity of keeping you prisoner, but your ultra-gamma research cannot be permitted to proceed further without control."

Both Crown and Ragon started. "Mr. Hermes!" they murmured simultaneously.

"But how can that be?" went on Crown in amazement. "Hermes—or Martin—was here on Earth last night."

"And why not?" said Ragon. "He could get here as quickly as a mail shipment. But listen."

"This is an outrage, sir," Dr. Arnold protested. "You know the penalty for molesting the person of an Earth citizen."

"I know," interrupted Martin-Hermes. "But this crisis goes beyond mere personalities. For the last time, I will pay you one million erg credits for ultra-gamma, ten percent of all net profits and furnish you with a laboratory for the supervised continuation of your research."

"I refuse to deal with an unscrupulous pirate," replied Arnold hotly. "Why, my experiments are scarcely past the initial stage. I don't even know that teleportation will prove practical."

"I know," said Martin-Hermes, smiling coldly. "I am willing to take the chance."

"And if I refuse?"

"I am trying to deal with you on a fair ba-

sis, Dr. Arnold. Your work, as far as it has progressed, is in my hands. You cannot go free if we do not come to terms. The ultimatum, my dear Doctor, would be unpleasant."

"You—"

**W**ITH a metallic, scratching sort of squeak, the screen went blank and silent.

"Sturgeon must have slipped down the ventilator shaft," observed Ragon. "No wonder Hermes wants this evidence. You called him Martin. Who is Martin?"

"Sidney Martin is one of the high officials of Inter-spaceways Freighting Service," said Crown heavily. "What is Dr. Arnold doing on Mars?"

"He was pursuing research on ultra-gamma rays," said Ragon grimly. "I'm beginning to understand certain factors of this muddle."

"Then explain them to me," snapped J. Harvard Crown. "What was that you said about defying gravity?"

"Inter-spaceways is a pretty big concern," replied Ragon thoughtfully. "A lot of capital and ships and men are tied up in inter-planetary freighting."

"The biggest corporation of the five colonized planets," amplified Crown.

"What would happen to them if Dr. Arnold perfected a means of transporting matter from one planet to another via ultra-gamma?"

"They would be ruined," Crown whispered. "But, great gods of space, man—they are not criminals!"

"Obviously, Mr. Martin is," answered Ragon succinctly.

"I'll have him apprehended by the I. P. immediately," decided Crown. "Interplanetary News has more influence than some people think."

"If you lay hands on him—what happens to Vedalia?"

"If she is still alive," groaned Crown.

"She is," declared Ragon. "At least, she was early this morning."

"How do you know?" pleaded the anxious father.

"At times I dimly understand the way her brain works. She left the thought record hoping she would get in touch with me. Well, she did. She tricked or argued this Martin-Hermes into paying a visit to SOS this morning. Knowing my daily routine, she managed to arrange for him to meet me at the helicop level.

"He didn't defy gravity. He teleported himself from this office to the fiftieth level. Vedralia sent him to this office so I could see him. Perhaps she led him to believe that you had turned Sturgeon's shipment over to me. And that gives me an idea how we can trap him!"

"I don't follow you, but what shall we do?"

"First, we prepare an autovox message to Mr. Hermes, telling him that the package is here in this office. We will place the message on Miss Crown's autovox in her boudoir and arrange it to play automatically upon the coming of the ultra-gamma tight beam. Mr. Hermes will shift his beam to this spot and pick up his package."

"And what good does that do us?"

"I neglected to say that another little instrument will be secreted in your daughter's bedroom, and a duplicate will be functioning here. These are radiation detectors invented by Dr. Arnold and myself. They will record the direction from which the ultra-gamma tight beam comes. A reading from the detector in your home and a reading from the detector here will give us a triangulation."

"I see," cried Crown, nodding. "Where the two lines cross—"

"We should find Mr. Hermes and Vedralia—if we act quickly," finished Ragon. "I'll have to leave the vibro-shield down so Hermes can get through."

"But suppose Martin suspects a trap?"

"It's too logical to be a trap. Hermes threatens you through your daughter. You had already called SOS in on the case of Arthur Sturgeon. You now prevail on me to surrender, unopened, the Sturgeon package. You leave a message for Hermes in the bedroom."

"He switches here and procures the package. As for a possible trap, within that tight beam, he knows himself to be invulnerable. It is afterward that we must trap him."

"Get busy," said J. Harvard Crown grimly.

At eighteen-five that evening, Ragon and Crown crouched in the next office to Ragon's central chamber and saw a sphere of solid black form in the air above the horse-shoe desk and rapidly expand to engulf and hide the solid piece of furniture with the Sturgeon package resting thereon. It was an eerie experience.

Then the sphere shrank and was gone—so was the package from the desk.

"Incredible," murmured the news magnate.

Ragon was busily working with a queer little bronze machine at his side. Then he

sprang up and rushed to the televis instrument, which was flashing signals from his desk. The head and face of the trusted operative he had stationed at the Crown home came into view.

"You have your readings, Lamont?" Ragon asked quickly.

"Yes, sir," said the operative, holding up a pad of penciled figures.

Ragon copied them off, did some quick calculations and reached out his hand toward a huge hemi-globular map of North America. Swiftly he laid out his projections, placed his pencil tip on a spot just north of New Washington.

"There we are, sir," he said to his companion. "Let's go."

"The nerve!" breathed Crown. "Within twenty miles of here."

Five minutes later, three helicopters dropped on the grounds of the winter home of Carson Drake, the tomato king, who was idly cruising in his space yacht, unaware of what was going on at his residence.

**A**RMED with electro-paralysis weapons, eight determined men broke into the Drake library. The scene that met their eyes was bizarre and exotic, to say the least. Still attired in her bewitching nightdress, Vedralia Crown was curled up on the Jason-built divan, coolly smoking a cigaret of Jovian tobacco.

Facing her beside a machine that looked like an insulated transformer with octopus legs, was Mr. Hermes. He held the now opened Sturgeon package and was triumphantly examining it.

He looked up, startled, at the very prosaic sound of splintering doors. Swift comprehension was one of Mr. Hermes' strong points. He recognized Crown and Ragon instantly, understood how he had been traced.

"Paralyze, Mr. Hermes-Martin!" ordered Ragon.

Hermes' answer was a mocking laugh.

"You are mistaken, SOS," he said. "This is where I get off!"

Before the paralysis bolt from Ragon's weapon could reach Hermes, a black ball of nothingness leaped magically into being and spread like an ink pall before his chest. It swelled to engulf both man and machine. Then it contracted swiftly.

Hermes and his machine had vanished!

"A second ultra-gamma control a step beyond this one," Ragon cried in vexation.

Vedralia Crown uttered a cry of delight

and sprang to her feet.

"Dee!" she cried. "And Dad! I knew you two would do it."

Ragon narrowly side-stepped being drawn into the girl's double-armed embrace as she reached for her father and partner at the same time.

"Take her home, Mr. Crown," he said tersely. "You may use my helicop. I'll ride back with one of the men."

"Oh, Dee—Dr. Ragon," cried Vedralia, "I must tell you how I got Mr. Hermes to go to the agency office without letting him know it was also my office."

"Let me be the first to congratulate you," interrupted Ragon, averting his eyes from her revealing garment. "But tell your father about it. I've something important to do that's been delayed too long already."

"What are you going to do, Ragon?" demanded J. Harvard Crown.

"I am personally going to Mars to find out what happened to Arnold and Sturgeon," said the head of SOS harshly.

"Now, isn't that a coincidence!" exclaimed Vedralia. "I had just decided to make that investigation myself. When are we leaving, Dee?"



## VENUS SKY-TRAP

*A Complete Interplanetary Novellet*

By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

NEXT ISSUE



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"We know you're from the third planet from the sun," the creature said

# THEY SCULP

By **LESLIE NORTHERN**

*Little Betty Anne and Tramp Joe Caffee Become Prisoners  
in a Space Warp Inhabited by the Giraffe People!*

**B**ETTY ANNE didn't like the new neighbors. She'd overheard them talking together, and though she didn't know the meaning of the word they'd called her daddy she knew it was a very crooked word.

"X-send-trick!"

She hated crooked people. Wonderful was her daddy, straight in everything he did, and she couldn't stand it when people whispered

about him behind his back.

Who else but her daddy could have built a cage with giraffe people peering out, not between bars at all, but straight out between big red and white candy sticks like in front of barber shops?

He'd locked up the garage, and didn't know she was inside now standing in front of the cage. She was sure if he did know he'd have been worried, and it was a shame the way



mean, crooked people worried her daddy.

The grocer was crooked and the rent man was bent, and there could be no meaner person than the droopy-looking big man in a black overcoat who'd gone inside the house, and carried off all of her daddy's "furnasure."

The droopy big man had taken the "furnasure" away in a van, and right after that her daddy had locked himself in the garage, and she'd had the hardest time getting him to talk about the cage.

"What would happen if I was locked up behind those big peppermint sticks, Daddy," she'd ask, and that had started him talking.

"They're not peppermint sticks, Betty Anne, and it just looks like a cage. The candy sticks are force bands and the redness is a space-warp field. If you were behind the bars you'd be warped through the space-time continuum, and come out on one of the planets—Mars, Venus, or Mercury. But you couldn't begin to understand."

"Couldn't I, Daddy?"

"No, and I'm not going to torture my own child by trying to explain what a warp field is. If you had a mature mind you'd know that highly technical explanations seldom mean anything. When a man is a real physicist he knows when he's on the right track and when he isn't, but he doesn't let theories bother him until he's done it."

"Have you done it, Daddy?"

"Betty Anne, that cage, as you call it, was a lucky accident invention. If it flew apart not even Einstein could put it together again."

"But you could, Daddy?"

"No, I couldn't. You can seldom duplicate lucky accident inventions. They're much too simple in a complex way."

"So," she'd thought. "Daddy's being modest again." Modest was a grownup word, but she knew what it meant. It meant being able to do anything, but pretending you were not bright at all.

**L**ATER, she'd waited inside the garage, crouching behind the car until he'd locked her in. He hadn't acted modest, standing in front of the cage, and thinking out loud like a lot of people were talking to him inside his head, and he'd been hurt so bad he had to talk back.

"What price genius? You'd think I'd tried to poison somebody's cat. Just how much of a man's furniture has to go when he's working on an inside track?"

She'd known who he was really talking to, of course. He was talking to a Somebody called Posterity and she'd heard him say it so

many times she could say it, too.

Posterity! You had a doll and somebody took it away, and somebody blackened your face and laughed at you, and then would come—Posterity! Posterity would give you a new and better doll, and wash your face, and kiss you, and put you to bed between stiff white sheets.

She'd wondered what he'd meant by an inside track. Did he mean that inside trains you saw new and wonderful places that made you wish you were grown up?

She'd waited until he was gone before coming out from behind the car and crawling toward the cage on her hands and knees. She'd heard the padlock rattle on the outside door, and his footfalls going back into the house. Her daddy had a heavy tread.

Clump, clump, clump, like he was all drooping down from his shoulders into the ground.

She wasn't scared to be alone with the cage, because he had invented it. She wasn't scared, so—why had he told her to stay away from it?

"Don't stand too close to the cage, Betty Anne. The warp field would draw you in, and whirl you around like a little white feather."

Closer and closer she'd crawled, till the candy bars had begun to frighten her. They looked like big red and white candles melting and flickering and running together. Very close up something like a hand she couldn't see, big and flat, had given her a push, and something like an eggbeater had whipped her around and spanked her till she'd started bawling.

Suddenly everything had seemed to stop. She was sitting on the floor again, and the cage had changed back. It was a cage again, only now she wasn't alone with it. She'd had to rub her eyes to make sure she was really awake.

The giraffe people were staring out between the candy sticks straight at her. Very high up they were, with big, hooved feet and flapping hands, and all shiny were their eyes peering out. In a dream, she knew, it was all right to run. But when you were locked up and couldn't, it was wrong to be scared. You couldn't be a coward, then, even to want to run.

Just to make sure she wasn't scared, she'd started crawling toward the cage again. For a better look, closer and—

Swish! Thump! Slap!

**N**OW she was moving closer again for the umph-time, because the eggbeater had made her very mad,

She had a feeling the giraffe people were on her side. They'd moved back when the big hand had pushed her back, as though it wasn't anything they could help, and they wanted her to know it.

They'd wriggled their big ears at her, and now she was walking straight toward them with her chin stuck out. Nearer and nearer, and they were nodding at her, and telling her not to be afraid—

She screamed and tried to jump back. Something had grabbed hold of her, but she couldn't see it because all at once she was being pulled straight in between the candy sticks so fast she knew it wasn't the egg-beater, but a very thin wet hand with claws like she'd seen in an Oz book. . . .

He was a very tall, lean tramp who always thought of himself as a scarecrow, playing a game of touch and go with the police.

Ever-so-gentle was he in his thoughts. But the police called him a dangerous character, not good enough to sleep under haystacks, with the red harvest moon shining down on his gaunt unshaven face.

He'd never stolen anything, or made himself conspicuous by parading his leanness in front of restaurants, yet the police were always worried because he might take it into his head to put them on the spot.

He was running straight toward the garage in the moonlight, his tall body casting shadows even gaunter than the scarecrow he'd become through no fault of his own.

He could hear the heavy thud of flat feet on the grass behind him, the shrill bleat of a police whistle.

He veered sharply the instant he saw the big padlock on the garage door, leaving the gravel path and plunging into shadows with his head thrown back. At such moments his mind would become keen, alert, and he could smell out barn windows like a wheeling bat.

Whether in barns or garages, unlocked windows offered him a chance of getting his wind back. It wasn't touch or go so much when the police were outside wondering how he'd managed to give them the slip.

Sometimes a window would snap shut behind him like the jaws of a trap. More often the pounding feet would move on, and he'd be free again to drink in the beauty of the night.

The garage window was high and narrow. It creaked a little when he threw it open. But he made up for that by climbing in so soundlessly he could hear his racing heart beating wildly.

An electric bulb of low wattage splashed radiance over his long shadow as he swung

down inside. Then he flattened himself against a big Lincoln that looked as though it hadn't been moved since gas rationing went into effect.

He'd intended not to make a sound, but something happened, almost at once, which altered his plans. Something like a wind it was, blowing across the garage straight toward him, twisting him around and lifting him up.

First his shabby coat went up over his head, choking off his breathing, and then something seemed to take hold of him, and whirl him about. Around and around, faster and faster, till his head was lower than his seat. Then he could feel himself being funneled head downward into what could only have been a coal chute leading somewhere else. . . .

Swish, went the long grass, and bong, went the big bell inside his head. Swish, bong, swish bong, swish bong—

Blinking, he sat up. As he did so the bell seemed to swing away across vast, blue distances, and only the long grass remained, purple and sweet-scented, rising to his shoulders.

He wondered why they'd had to hit him so hard. A night stick could be used in two ways. To beat a tattoo on a man's soles till he stood up, or to make him sit down.

He was sitting down, so it had to mean some cop had stepped out of line, and used it the second way. If that had happened, there were "mouthpieces" he could get to talk about it for the purpose of making him rich!

For an instant he visualized himself in great pain, lying on a cold pavement with his knees higher than his head. Then he remembered he'd gone in through a window.

Memory came rushing back, in great, chill gusts. They hadn't hit at all! Not the police. He'd gone down through a coal chute into—wherever he was.

He wet his lips, raised his eyes slowly. No risk in that? He hadn't thought of being frightened, but what he saw scared him worse than the coal chute.

**T**HE sky was pale blue. Something had shriveled up the harvest moon so that it was now a little green pea floating in the middle of the sky.

He never knew how he got up from a sitting position to his feet. He seemed to float up, to stand looking out over the long, purple grass.

He stood there a long time, just staring and listening.

Somebody was sobbing in the long grass

a few feet from where he was standing. A small somebody, unless children had changed in the long years he'd been a shabby scarecrow with no one to smile down at.

He thought it best to lower himself to his knees before searching about for her through the long grass. He didn't want a frightened little face looking at him in terror, because he was so tall and thin.

"Daddy, Daddy!" Betty Anne was sobbing, and then she saw that he wasn't at all. He was just a plain tramp, with a red nose and a dented-in derby hat. She'd never seen a plain tramp before, but her daddy had. He'd told her there were many different kinds of such people—hoboes, drifters, hopheads, and plain tramps, real tramps, like when her daddy was a boy.

The plain tramp was scowling at her through the long grass, and shaking his head.

"Who are you?" she asked with a sob.

"You mean my handle. Joe Caffee, little lady. What's yours?"

"Betty Anne Andrews."

He smiled briefly. Then suddenly there was a worried expression on his face.

"How did we get here, little lady?" he asked. "Do you know?"

"The giraffe people brought me," she choked. "They carried me straight through the whopper field into here."

"The giraf—I don't think I've met them."

"You wouldn't like them. They're mean and crooked, and I hate them."

"Is that so?"

"They—they had like a clay modeling set, and they upset it on me!" she bridled, her lips trembling.

Joe Caffee's eyes widened. "They upset a clay modeling set on you?"

She nodded. "They rubbed on a clay modeling all sticky like mud. See?"

Betty Anne held out her hands for him to see.

"Hmm, yeah. Looks like somebody around her sculps."

"Sculps, Mister Joe?"

Joe nodded. "Makes statues and things. First they'd take an impression in clay. Then would come the real art work. I could maybe figure out more if I knew where we were. Sure you don't know?"

"'Course I know!" Betty Anne ejaculated. "We're on a planet away off in the sky. Daddy built a cage to make people crooked. Only it isn't really a cage. It's a space-curve-sure field. He said if you was inside it you would be all twisted up, like in a puzzle book, and you would come out on a planet through a back door in the sky."

Joe Caffee swabbed his perspiring brow. "Go on, little lady—just keep talking."

"Like when you walk through a door, and are in a house you never before saw. A crooked door, but when you come out you are straight once more."

Joe's lips were white. "I guess maybe we better start looking for your daddy," he muttered. "Here, grab hold of my hand. I'm kinda tall when I stand up."

"How can you find my daddy when he's hundreds and millions of miles away?"

She slipped her hand into his as she spoke, wondering why she'd asked. If grownups didn't know what they were doing it was no good asking, and if they did know, the worst things always happened.

There wasn't a sound as they moved through the long grass, except their soft footfalls, and the swish of the long grass bending. Their shadows kept pace with them, his long and hers short, on the grass ahead, and in patches on the earth between. There wasn't much earth, just a few, rusty-looking patches here and there where something had trampled the grass down and left big hoofmarks.

"Gee, your hand's cold," Betty Anne said suddenly. "You're not scared, are you?"

"Me scared?" Joe muttered. "Don't make me laugh, little lady."

"I'm awful scared, Uncle Joe. I really am."

He started to say something to reassure her, but before he could get the words out a voice whispered inside his head.

"No reason for the little Earth child to be frightened. We're not monsters."

With a great surge of horror Joe raised his eyes as though fearful he might not be mistaken.

He wasn't. The creature did have a long neck, like a giraffe, and its flesh was spotted. But its big balloonlike face wasn't in the least giraffe-like. It had ten-fingered hands which it was using now to part the long grass directly in front of him.

JOE tried vainly to moisten his lips. The creature's face was a yard from his own, and if someone had taken a big balloon and let all the air out, and then put a gash in with a penknife. Two widely-spaced eyes looked as if they'd been hastily painted in. Joe would rather have died a thousand deaths than to have created such a face.

"We know you're from the third planet from the sun, a planet which you call Earth and we call Kakacon," the creature said,

"We call our planet Nerulum."

Joe tried to look away, to wrench his gaze from the flabby-fleshed horror, but he could not. Its stare held him, and more than its stare the lower part of its body which was visible now between the long grass aroused his horror. The creature was squatting on its haunches, its long legs drawn up, and spread a little apart, and between its knees was a wrinkled kangaroo-like pouch which contained two miniature replicas of itself.

The young of the thing were peering at Joe over the rim of the pouch with unmistakable, cold contempt.

Their wide-spaced eyes were narrowed to steely slits.

"Why are you trembling?" the monstrous creature chided. "Is it because we can read your thoughts, and make our thoughts known to you without moving our lips? Surely—surely there is nothing terrifying about an extra-sensory faculty which you also possess. Telepathy is born into us, but you have it, too. From quite a distance we were aware of your thoughts."

The creature thrust its hideous face still further forward, generating ideas in Joe's brain which he normally would have refused to entertain. He'd never touched the stuff, so how could he be going through a nightmare of shrieking terror? He'd never known what it was like to have the boozehumps, the ginters, or the beezy-wheezyes, so how could he be having them now?

"You just now told the Earth child that we sculp. If you mean we make reproductions of beautiful things, we do! In fact, it's a consuming passion with us. When we can't sculp, we are miserable. But when we can—oh, bliss, rapture!"

Joe froze. One of the giraffelets was leaning from the pouch, and sticking out its tongue at him.

The creature shuddered, grabbed the offending one by its spotted neck, and pushed it down into the pouch out of sight. For an instant its other offspring stared, goggle-eyed, and then—it took the hint. A second later it popped into view again, pursed its lips, and made a sound that wasn't extra-sensory.

"Phat!" it went. "Phaat—phypat!"

The creature glanced down angrily, and closed the pouch by locking its ten-digitated hands over its stomach.

"The little Earth child's parent must be a remarkable Kakaonian," it said. "He constructed a force field which has enabled us

to pass back and forth between Kakaon and Nerulum almost instantly. Space warp propulsion. Our construction manuals describe such fields, but we've never been able to build one."

"I—I didn't see no field when I came out into here," Joe muttered.

"Naturally you didn't. You were expelled with great violence, and hurled several hundred feet, as you measure distance."

"Uncle Joe, before he hurts us!" came in a sob from Betty Anne. "Pick me up and put me on your shoulder like you was running from Boris Karloff!"

**T**HE creature's shiny eyes protruded, and a faint redness crept up over its long neck. "Why should the Earth child be frightened, when we sculped her so beautifully?"

Joe's jaw tightened. His voice was suddenly harsh, defiant. "Look, tell me something. You got—sort of canals here. They're like rivers, only you dig 'em. Have you got 'em?"

"You mean artificial waterways? Of course we have them. A continuous network covering the entire planet."

"Then I know where we are!" Joe whispered huskily. "You call it Nerulum, but we call it—Mars!"

"Uncle Joe, look out!" Betty Anne screamed.

The smother of wet clay caught Joe by surprise. It thudded against his face and ran down his neck, hurling him violently backwards.

"Galump—arrgggg!"

"Oh, Uncle Joe!"

Joe came sputtering up out of a sea of wet clay with his lips pulled back, his eyes glued shut. He unlimbered his knees, jerked his arms about, and made a weird, gurgling sound deep in his throat.

"A temporary inconvenience, nothing more," an admonishing voice said. "In a moment, when the clay has hardened, we'll remove the cast. You wouldn't want to stiffen up in a grotesque and hideous position, would you?"

Somehow through his panic Joe sensed that the creature was handling his mind with iron fingers of incredible strength.

"If you persist in struggling," it warned, "the cast will be ruined. I've got something here I could press against your nostrils. It wouldn't hurt much, but, the trouble is, it might stiffen you beyond redress. If your metabolism has been speeded up such a powerful drug couldn't possibly do anything but kill you."

AT THIS Joe stopped struggling—so abruptly his tall body assumed the rigid contours of a galvanized corpse.

"Ah, that's the right attitude. Now, just breathe naturally. I've inserted breathing tubes in your nostrils, and the clay is quite porous. Directly it hardens I'll carry you to the studio."

The creature hadn't warned Joe it intended to carry him in its stomach pouch. But when he felt himself being lifted up, the folds of cold flesh which enmeshed his limbs told him where he was.

He couldn't quite fathom how he knew the creature's flesh was cold, and clammy. But somehow he did know, despite the thin coating of clay which covered him.

"Don't Kakaonians smell funny, little brother?" said one of the little ones who was in the pouch with him.

"Phatt! Phatt—phypat!"

The bigger creature traveled by leaps and bounds. From the jolts that shuddered up through Joe Caffee every time it descended and took off, he was sure the leaps were long ones. He was sure of nothing else.

Sweat broke clammy on him beneath the clay, his mouth felt parched, and his stomach weighted with lead.

Suddenly the jolts ceased to come at intervals. Ceased so abruptly to come he could hear the blood pounding in his ears, and the muffled, slow beating of his heart.

The voice came again.

"We have arrived at the studio. I am about to lift you out, but you must not attempt to move until I crack the cast."

He felt himself being taken from the pouch.

"Remember now—you are not to move!"

He stood rigid, scarcely daring to breathe, waiting for he knew not what. Waiting for something!

Crack!

The hammer of Thor could not have descended with greater violence against a vaster backdrop of stars. He was rocked back, and then forward. Back, and then forward. His brain reeled, and the shell of blackness shattered about him. Shrieking winds seemed to drag him down into the earth.

When Joe Caffee again opened his eyes, he was sitting on a firm, unmoving ground, staring up at a sloping surface studded with little, weaving blobs of light. Swiftly the light grew in brightness and became a single expanse, shining, translucent, dazzling his sight.

He lowered his gaze, and stared wildly

about him. The first thing he saw was the small, golden statue. It was sitting less than six feet from him—the statue of a little, pouting girl with her hands folded on her lap.

"Betty Anne!" he breathed. For an instant horror stabbed at him.

The Midas touch? Merciful heavens! Had the creatures the ghastly power of turning flesh and blood to shining metal?

"Uncle Joe!" came a small voice from behind him. "Oh, Uncle Joe, look! That's me in a sculp!"

He swung about, his breath coming spasmodically.

A flesh and blood Betty Anne was staring at him with tears glistening on her cheeks. But so intense was the look of pride in her eyes that it outshone the wetness, and the furious blinking of her long lashes.

"Little lady, for a minute I thought you was a goner for sure," Joe almost sobbed. "Pure gold and sweet, but you're nicer alive!"

"Uncle Joe, I'm still scared!" Betty Anne sobbed, crawling toward him on her hands and knees. "This is an awful crooked place."

"Yeah, so I see. How—how did you get here?"

"The giraffe people brought me. There are many more of them, Uncle Joe. The one that brought you hit you with a big stick, and then it took the clay modeling off you, and went quick away."

"It did, eh?" Joe muttered, swallowing a lump.

"Uncle Joe, it pushed open a secret wall panel like in the spookies, and then it went out."

Joe scarcely seemed to hear her. He was examining his surroundings with a strained intensity, his eyes narrowed and alert. The studio resembled a big greenhouse, all windowpanes except where the sloping roof was crossed by a supporting bar of glowing metal a yard or more in width.

The panes were not transparent, but translucent. Beyond them was a weaving film of something he couldn't quite make out. Mist, maybe. He'd already noticed that all the illumination came from outside, and was faintly greenish, and bright.

Now he was noticing other things. Tall, covered shapes standing at intervals around the studio.

Statues? Well, there were dried lumps of clay scattered around, as if there was a lot of sculpting going on. A few unfinished jobs would fit into the picture, right enough.

SILVER shadows spilled down over the covered shapes from the faintly luminous panes. There was a pool of radiance on the floor where Betty Anne sat.

Joe Caffee shivered a little, because it was cold in the studio. The wrappings on the statues looked blubbery and wet. He wondered what the giraffe people used to cover the statues with. Oilskin slickers from Davy Jones' locker? Bosh, he was letting his imagination run riot. More likely they'd simply raided somebody's belfry, and covered the statues with the skin-wings of glary-eyed bats.

Joe got unsteadily to his feet, and swayed toward one of the cloaked shapes.

"Maybe we won't like it when we've seen it," he muttered. "But we'll just have a look."

Reaching out, he gripped the wrapping firmly, and bared the shape beneath with an abrupt, vigorous jerk.

Betty Anne screamed.

Joe Caffee didn't cry out, or even move his lips. He just stood still, not making a sound, with no expression at all on his face. But in his mind there began an inward shrinking from the ghastliness of what he saw.

Physically the shape which stood facing him was close enough to humanity to be terrifying. It looked not unlike an enormous, mummified bullfrog, agate-eyed, and with folds of dead-black flesh obscuring the lineaments of its face.

It wasn't quite a skeleton, though. Yet so shrunken was it that every bone, joint and tendon in its quasi-human body was visible through its flesh. Its eyes were wide open, and fastened in an unblinking stare on Joe's face. But worse than all else, much, much worse—the thing was alive!

As Joe stood transfixed a veined lid sheathed its right eye for the barest instant. Then it blinked its left eye, and a shudder went through it.

Unmistakably into its stare there crept an awareness of his presence. The awareness deepened, seemed to reach out toward him as though in alarm.

Words formed in his brain. As clearly as though the creature had spoken with its lips he heard it speak.

"Get out quickly," it said. "Get out while there is still time!"

He was aware of speech sounds from another direction, babbling, audible—and quite as insistent.

"Uncle Joe—oh, I'm awful afraid. Please, Uncle Joe, do something!"

Joe barely managed his trembling lips. But it was a necessary effort, it had to be made.

"Who are you?" was all he needed to say. "We were powerful once—ruled this planet," came the reply. "The hoppers are artists, live for pleasure. We are workers, builders. But that was long ago, before the climate changed."

"The climate—changed?"

"It got drier. We built canals, but still our tissues shrank. Weakness, inertia crept upon us. Now the hoppers hold the whip hand. We're cut off from the light—no hope for us."

The creature shuddered convulsively. "They won't let us die. They keep us dehydrated—deny us even—canal water. Suspended animation—metabolism slowed to the vanishing point. They've always hated us."

Joe sucked in his breath, and tried to adjust to the flow of high-ampered thoughts which swirled in eddies from the frog creature's brain.

"We despised them because they were lazy, self-indulgent. But now they spend all their time—modeling us. They use the things we made, live in the cities we built, and—make statues of us."

"But w-why?" Joe asked in husky tones.

"It gives them pleasure, that's why. They like to model, and—all animal life disappeared when the climate changed. Now they'll model you—over and over and over and—you'll be unable to resist. They'll drug you—keep you here. You've got to get out."

Wildly Joe stared about him.

"The wall is crystal thin," the creature said urgently. "Smash it, hurry!"

The creature was shaking convulsively. "They've gone to the smelting studio. When they come back it will be too late. Smash a pane—get out, get out!"

Joe's eyes were suddenly oddly moist. He tapped his forehead. "You know a lot about what goes on in here, eh? More than they do?"

"Yes, yes, our powers are greater than theirs. They can only hear your thoughts, but we can share your emotions."

Joe nodded, and reached out a hand. The frog creature's shoulder was so dry it rasped his palm. He clasped it notwithstanding.

"You know what we mean when we say somebody is a good guy?" he whispered.

FOR an instant the frog creature appeared puzzled. Then its eyes brightened. Joe was sure of one thing—a little of the wretchedness had gone out of its stare.

"I know exactly what you mean," the thing said. "We've met and exchanged hellos. Sort of instant liking, eh? Ships that pass in the



night, dipping their colors."

"My buddies call me Joe," Joe gulped. "All I can say is—thanks, pal."

"That's all right, Joe—skip it. We're a lost race—the sun has set for us. But if you get away I'll have something to remember."

Joe Caffee nodded and swung about. Betty Anne was still sobbing, but the little golden statue seemed to be smiling.

He picked the statue up. It was heavy—just heavy enough to throw. He hefted it, and nodded at Betty Anne.

"Keep close to me, little lady," he said, softly. "Close like a shadow."

Joe's fingers tightened on the statue. His arm went back.

"So long, Joe. Good luck."

The silence in the studio was shattered by a sudden, splintering crash. Snatching up Betty Anne, Joe took her out of that place, across a road and out into a field of grass—long, purple grass. Then he set her down and got busy.

"Uncle Joe, what are you doing?" asked Betty Anne, after a while.

Crouching amid that weird-looking grass, Joe vouchsafed no reply. He had turned out his pockets, and on the soil beside him lay a jack-knife, a spool of fine copper wire, a small bar magnet, a thimble, and a tarnished white cent.

The magnet and the thimble had served Joe well in his lean and hungry years. The magnet he used while fishing for coins under grates in cities, the thimble whenever his big toe came through his shoes, and he had a mending job on his hands. To say he'd found a hundred uses for the jack-knife would be an understatement. The spool of wire he'd found and kept to thread through his suspenders and belt if, and when, they showed signs of wearing out. He liked steel pennies because sometimes they were worth ten of the copper ones, if the other fellow wasn't the noticing kind.

He was glad now he'd acquired a fondness for gadgets. Suddenly and overwhelmingly glad as with swift, competent fingers he did things with the magnet, the knife, the thimble and the cent.

Did incredible things, so that Betty Anne stared goggle-eyed, all of her fright forgotten.

"There!" he said at last, and started twining the wire in delicate loops about the strange contrivance he'd made of the knife, the dime, the thimble, and the magnet.

"Uncle Joe, what is it?" asked Betty Anne.

"It's an apparatus for detecting the presence of electric currents," Joe said. "A bit on the makeshift side, but still a beautiful

little solenoid-magnet arrangement. When Faraday performed his great experiment which led to the discovery of induced electro-magnetic currents he used one just about as primitive."

"Uncle Joe!"

"Huh? Oh, I—I'm sorry if I scared you, little lady. It sort of slipped out."

"What did, Uncle Joe?"

"Things I know—like the number of molecules in a gram of hydrogen, and what happens when a standing wave of three nodes runs smack into an ultra-violet photon."

Betty Anne clapped her tiny hands. "Uncle Joe, you've had one!"

"Had what, little lady?"

"An eddication!"

Joe grinned. "Well, since you've smoked me out I may as well own up to it. A sound one in physics, but I couldn't seem to magnetize the alloy I invented when it developed flaws and started slipping. I took the easy way down, little lady."

"Uncle Joe, say something that makes sense."

"Well, if the warp field is anywhere in the neighborhood, the flow of electric fluids through this magnet here should lead us to it. The nearer we come to it, the more intense the flow should become."

Joe Caffee stood up. He looked grotesque, over-laden, the little gold statue under one arm, the electric-circuit apparatus in his hands.

"Come on, little lady," he said. "We've got to keep moving."

Long, purple grass again, parting and bending. The crunch of their footfalls on the harsh soil. The small, pea-sized moon shining down.

"Little lady, there's a current already," Joe exclaimed suddenly. "A current—and it's getting stronger!"

The ground had begun to slope, and they were mounting a hill that rose from the plain in purple billows. Higher they climbed and higher, their bodies tilted a little forward and then more sharply forward as the ascent became still steeper.

Eighty feet above the plain a patch of level countryside swept into view, grassy purple in all directions. At a hundred feet the vista was still grassy, but the color had gone out of it. Utterly drab it looked, as though a cloud of bleaching powder particles had descended upon it.

**R**APIDLY they were approaching the summit when Betty Anne clutched his sleeve. "Uncle Joe, if that sculp of me is real

gold, wouldn't it be worth a hundred million dollars?" she whispered.

"It would be worth plenty melted down," Joe grunted. "But it might be worth more to an art gallery. People who aren't all mean inside, like little girls in art, song, and story."

"How could they, Uncle Joe?"

"Well, they do. In fact, a Victorian poet called Swinburne once made up a little rhyme about it. This is what he wrote: 'If the golden-crested wren were a nightingale, why then, something seen and heard of men, might be half as sweet as when, laughs a child of seven.'"

"Uncle Joe!" Betty Anne gasped. "Did you hear anything?"

If something from an umph-dimension had descended on Joe's shoulder and slithered down his back, it is doubtful if he could have turned his head about with greater celerity.

For an instant, as he stood listening he wasn't sure, and then—he'd guessed right. The sound was far off—faint, but unmistakable. It sounded like the patter of hailstones on a taut canvas sheet, but Joe knew the giraffe people were coming up over the crest of the hill toward them.

"Hoofbeats!" Betty Anne shrieked.

For one awful moment Joe Caffee stood as though frozen. Then he was in motion, with Betty Anne's hand in his and her bobbing curls trailing in the wind.

"Keep climbing!" he yelled. Betty Anne needed no urging.

She reached the top of the hill ahead of him, and swung about like a small windmill, her arms flapping, her skirts whipping against her knees. Almost it seemed to Joe that he had floated up. Something seemed to take hold of him, and lift him toward the summit so that, when he found himself at her side, he was too startled to cry out.

Up the slope beneath them, a hundred long-necked creatures were bounding in twenty-foot leaps. So numerous were they that there wasn't a yard of hillside beneath that wasn't a springboard for a giraffe shape descending or taking off. And though they traveled in leaps their hoofbeats made a continuous, clattering sound which vibrated against Joe's skull until his senses reeled.

Nearer and nearer they approached. Directly behind him he heard a bell chiming, and far off in the distance he saw a city with domes all purple and glowing, and a snaking narrow watercourse which curled into the vague distance.

"Uncle Joe, help!"

Just in time Joe swung about. He couldn't see all of the giraffe creature, just its long

neck sweeping toward her through the long grass in a swirl of dust.

Like a serpent it looked, and Joe's spine crinkled, and his flesh went cold. He ripped the jack-knife free of the tangle of wires with a single, violent jerk. He'd never thrown a knife before. Never before. But he felt calm and sure of himself.

Twang!

Joe dropped the magnet, and stared at the knife he'd thrown. It was vibrating in a cloven hoof. Slumped in a grotesque heap, its haunches higher than its head, the giraffe creature was tearing at the blade with its long fingers, and whinnying like an injured horse.

"That was for Crinkly Face!" Joe flung the words out savagely. He took a slow step backward, and—everything began to whirl.

Betty Anne had been teetering saucer-eyed at his side.

Now she was spinning backward into a glimmering square of radiance, criss-crossed with bands of reddish light.

As she rose into the air the little golden statue was torn from Joe's clasp. With erratic jerks it went bumping over the ground as though in pursuit of its flesh-and-blood prototype, its head a blaze of shimmering flame.

For the barest instant Betty Anne and the golden child were silhouetted against the warp field, their outlines dimmed by depthless black. Then the red bands turned green, and all the air on the hilltop seemed to rush into the field, lifting Joe up and carrying him straight into the glimmering glory with his head lower than his seat. . . .

Several months later, art lovers in a large city were surprised to receive catalogues, which read:

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Wilbur Westfield—"Art and the Mechanical Age."



I carried Dot back to the spring

# YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE

By WILM CARVER

*He Was the Only Man in the World Who Remembered the Little Pink House Everyone Sees — and for That He Was Punished as No Man Had Ever Been Punished Before!*

**Y**OU saw a little pink house, today. You had never seen it before. Yet, you had seen it many times. And you'll see it again.

You doubt? Then read—read carefully, for this is not a story, but a warning; a warning about the little pink houses.

They're pretty little houses. Square, flat little houses, with no doors or windows. It's hard to get into those little houses. But it's easy to get out. I did.

You see them every day. But you never

do anything about them. There's one in the park, near your home. You are walking your girl around the lake. You see this shining, little pink house in your path. You are amazed and alarmed. A house shouldn't be in the park. It wasn't there, yesterday. You hurry away to report it. But you never do. . . .

I was convalescing, following my accident in the shipyard. I had suffered a slight skull fracture, and the doctors had removed a splinter of bone from my brain.

Nothing serious, they said, but it would be necessary for me to rest a few weeks. Nothing serious!

That warm spring morning, I got off the bus at Thomas and Park Streets, just as I'd done a hundred times. It was eight blocks to the home of my fiancée, Dot Lowden. A long walk, but there was the gas-rationing.

She lived next to a grove of trees. Oaks, cedars, magnolias. It was a pretty spot. Dot and I often picnicked by a little spring a hundred feet back among the trees. In fact, we had one planned for that morning.

Dot was little and slim, with eyes that squinched up when she was thinking.

"Honey," she said, as she kissed me, "you don't know how glad I am, that you're out of that hospital! Everything's ready. I'll tell Daddy goodbye." She kept house for her father, John Lowden, who taught History in Fremont High-school.

I'll never forget that stroll through the woods. Birds darted around us, their music meant for us alone. I plucked a magnolia blossom, and Dot was gaily fastening it in her hair, as we came out into the little grassy clearing.

We both saw the pink house at the same time. It was low, square. The roof was flat, with no overhang whatever. No doors or windows marred its pale, pink walls. But still, it looked like a house. A little, modernistic pink house. It sat in the grass, on the other side of the spring, gleaming rosily in the sun.

"George—" Dot's voice trembled. "It—it wasn't here yesterday!"

I nodded. I set the basket on the ground, and walked slowly toward that house. Dot stepped on my heels, all the way. I put my hand on the smooth wall. It felt like pearl. I moved around to the "side" of that perfect square. I went cold. That house had been there for years. The huge, gnarled, wild-grape vine that had climbed up the wall and spread its tendrils over the roof, told that.

"George," Dot quavered. "I'm frightened. Let's go."

"Wait." I patted her arm. "There's something funny here." I looked about the tiny glade we had visited so many times. I led Dot back to the front. There was the spring, not a dozen feet away. There was the mossy carpet, where we had spread our cloth to eat.

"Dot," I said, "there's some natural explanation to all this. After all, it's just a little house, even if it has no doors or windows. Maybe it's a new-fangled portable

house." I stopped. It wasn't new, it was old. "Anyway, we came here for a picnic. Let's eat. Perhaps somebody will show up."

She was game. We spread the cloth, arranged the things upon it, just as we'd always done. As we ate, we gradually forgot the pink house, behind us. For a time, we were happy, carefree. Dot's laughter tinkled through the glade, as in the past. Only now and then did a stray glance bring a strained look to one of our faces, to be reflected instantly in the other's.

We drank from the cold, clear spring. Dot splashed a handful into my face. I chased her, caught her just as she reached the edge of the clearing. I carried her back to the spring. She settled down in my arms, her cheek pressed against mine. Her hand lifted and tenderly touched the newly-healed scar on my temple.

"I'm glad you're all right now, Honey," she murmured. I stroked her hair. But my eyes were fixed on that little pink house.

**L**AST week I had sat in that same spot. That house had not been there then, despite the proof that it had been there for years. Then, what had been there? Shrubs? Grass? I sat up, abruptly.

A few feet from the corner of that cube was a tiny cluster of wild strawberries. Last week I had stooped and picked Dot a handful of the tart berries. My head must have been an inch from the corner of that pink cube. Why had I, or Dot, or any of the many people who came to this quiet spot not seen it?

What had I seen there?

"Dot," I said quietly. "Tell me, what did we do on all the other occasions that we came here?"

She looked at me, wonderingly.

"Why, we always did what we are doing now. We ate, and drank from the spring, and picked flowers, and—" she blushed—"maybe did just a little bit of spooning."

"And sometimes there were others here?"

"Oh, yes. Once a whole family had the place littered terribly."

"And we, or no one, ever saw that house?"

"Of course not!" Dot answered indignantly.

I lit a cigarette.

"Then, what did we see, there on that spot?"

"Why—" Dot's eyes squinched up. "Why, nothing. The grass, a shrub or two, I suppose."

"But you don't remember anything definite there. That strawberry cluster, for in-

stance. That little cedar sapling. That rock. You remember them. You remember seeing them in their own individual positions, don't you?"

She nodded slowly.

"But you don't remember any definite, tangible thing in the area now occupied by that—that house. It is about a dozen feet square. There must have been something there. A stone, a hump in the ground, a bush."

She shook her dark head.

"I can't—can't remember."

I stood up, lifted her to her feet.

"Dot, let's go. We are going to the proper authorities and report this. It's queer!"

She was pitifully willing. Neither of us spoke until we were well along the path. Then:

"It was a lovely outing, wasn't it, honey?" Dot's voice was as gay as a child's. "Let's have one more before you go back to work. It's so peaceful there. Nothing to worry about, nothing to think about but the trees and the birds—"

"What!" I stopped, stared down at her in amazement.

"Why do you look at me like that?" Her eyes were bewildered. "Didn't you enjoy it?"

"Yes, of course. But—"

"Oh, you poor thing, you're tired!" she exclaimed, clasping my hand. "You still haven't recovered from your accident. Oh, I shouldn't have let us stay so long!"

She took my arm, led me on. I waited, in growing terror of I knew not what, for her to mention the pink house, but she did not. She acted, I realized dazedly, as naturally as she always did when returning from the grove.

She broke into a run as we reached her home. Her father was on the porch. "Oh, Daddy!" I heard her say, breathlessly. "We had a wonderful time. It was one of the nicest picnics we ever had!"

"That's splendid, Dot." The old man looked at me keenly. "I'm afraid, though, that you let George over-exert himself. He appears a bit drawn."

I fell into the swing, stared numbly into their kind, solicitous eyes.

"Dot," I said jerkily. "Tell him about the house. The little pink house at the spring."

"House!" she gasped, her hand faltering to her throat. "Pink house!"

Her father, too, was alarmed. He got up quickly.

"George," he said sternly. "You come right in the house and lie down. I'll call a

doctor. You aren't well yet by any means!"

"Yes, hurry, Daddy!" Dot sobbed as she tried to lift me from my chair. "It's all my fault. I should have known—"

"Stop!" I jumped to my feet. "Dot, I don't know whether this is a joke or not, but I don't think it's funny! Tell him about the house. The strange, little pink house. The house that's sprung up at our picnic spot!"

"George, darling." Dot tried to put her arms around me. "You're ill, honey. Please come in the house. Daddy, help me get him inside!"

I backed away from them, stood panting against the wall.

"Keep away from me!" I shouted wildly. "You think I'm crazy. You're crazy, Dot! You must be—" My voice died away, as I realized what I was saying.

I STARED into her wide, horrified eyes. Slowly my hand went up to my temple, touched the thin, red scar. Had the doctors been wrong? Was it serious after all? Was—was I insane? I had to know.

"Dot," I said quietly. "Will you and your father go to the spring with me?"

Their eyes met, then John Lowden nodded slightly. Humoring a madman, I thought bitterly.

Dot held my hand tightly as we retraced our steps through the grove. Occasionally a muffled sob forced itself through her clenched lips. Her father walked silently, his arm linked casually through mine. We emerged into the clearing and:

"Look!" I shouted, in unholy triumph. "Now do you believe me? Now do you think I'm crazy?"

They stood rigid, their eyes fixed in unbelieving horror on that little pink house.

"You were right!" John Lowden gasped shakenly. "But you, Dot. Are you sure that you didn't see it before?"

"I didn't see it, Daddy," she quavered. "Oh, there's something awful, something terrible about this! Let's go call the police!" She broke into tears.

"Take it easy, Dot." I gathered her into my arms. I was calm again, now that I had learned that I was not crazy—or, at least, now that I was not the only one who suffered from delusions.

"Come! We will inform the authorities, have this mystery investigated!" John Lowden said determinedly. "That thing was not there, when I strolled through this grove yesterday."

Clinging tightly to one another, Dot and

I followed him away from that scene of mystery. We walked rapidly, eager to have the solid, comforting presence of blue uniforms around us as we related our incredible tale.

Dot's father turned his head, spoke kindly. "You see, my boy, that you need attention. I will call a dear friend of mine, Doctor Clarence Murray—"

"Yes, honey," Dot broke in pleadingly. "You're just tired. They let you out of the hospital too soon."

I began to tremble. I felt real madness blazing from my eyes.

"What do you mean?" I whispered, quivering. "You saw the house. You said you were going to call the police. Then what in heaven's name are you talking about?" This last at the top of my lungs.

Sobbing uncontrollably, Dot buried her face against my chest.

"There was no house, George," her father muttered huskily. "There was nothing but the glade, the spring. We—we did not say anything, my boy. We looked, then turned away." He bowed his head sadly.

I felt my reason tottering. In a frenzy I hurled Dot away from me. She crashed into a tree, sank limply to the ground in an agony of grief.

"George, please!" John Lowden said strickenly. He held out appealing hands.

I glared at him a moment, then turned and rushed madly away. I ran until the last ounce of stamina had been drained from my weakened body, then I collapsed upon a bench at the edge of the sidewalk. Gradually breath and reason came back to me. I looked dully around. I was on the bus-stop bench at Thomas and McCall Streets. A woman's white, frightened face peered from the window of the opposite house. An elderly man passed, looked at me nervously, then hurried on.

A bus stopped. I boarded it, rode downtown. In a bar I ordered a rum-and-soda. The alcohol gave me new strength, seemed to clarify my mind.

Remorse was a dull ache in my chest as I thought of how I had treated the girl I loved. Why could I not have remained calm, attempted to search for the answer to the baffling enigma with them. I shrugged hopelessly. Could I expect them to discuss a problem with a madman such as they believed me to be?

I dropped my head to my hands.

"Are they right?" I groaned brokenly. "Was there nothing there? Am I insane?"

"And how!" The bartender jerked his

thumb at the door. "I don't like the way you've been mumblin' to yourself, buddy!"

I flushed, got up. At the door I paused. A police car was cruising past the bar. I heard the radio's harsh voice:

"Car 21, go to 2295 Park Street. Signal 66. That is all."

**D**OT'S house! She and her father had decided to inform the police of my supposed abberation. For my own good they would have me confined for medical observation and treatment. I guessed what that decision had cost them.

I hesitated, then went to a hotel and registered under an assumed name. It was five P.M. I ordered a meal sent up, and forced it down. At nine I went out to a pay-station and called Dot.

"George! Where are you?" Her voice was haunted. "Come to me, darling," she begged. "We—they are looking for you."

"Dot," I said rapidly. "I know you think I'm crazy, but I'm not going to put myself into the hands of any psychiatrists—"

I stopped. I had been going to add: "Until I go to that grove for one last time and learn the truth of this."

But I thought she, in her anxiety for my welfare, would have the police waiting to nab me the moment I showed up.

"I'll see you soon, honey," I said gently. "I can't come now."

"Now listen to me, George! They won't harm you. They want to help you. Darling, please—"

I steeled myself and hung up on that passionately pleading voice.

It was midnight when I stole into the clearing and saw that devilish cube gleaming faintly in the moonlight. I doubted no longer. That house was there. Regardless of Dot and her father's denials, it was there.

I crept to the smooth, pink wall. I unwrapped the bulky parcel that I had brought with me. A heavy sledge, three massive chisels. I placed the edge of the strongest chisel against the wall.

My plan was to cut my way into that house by brute force. I swung the hammer. The blow echoed in ringing undertones through that lonely glade. My pocket-torch showed not the slightest nick in that smooth substance. I gritted my teeth, lifted the hammer again, then froze into an incredulous statue.

An oblong door-like section of the wall was changing color. As I stared, spell-bound, it glowed deep red then faded into a rosily-transparent film.



"Enter!" The command came clearly, yet I heard nothing.

I faltered, but my resolution had not been lightly made. Gripping my hammer, I stepped forward through that hazy pink curtain. The wall solidified behind me.

I stood half-blinded by the dazzling pink light that seemed to emanate from a point directly before and slightly below my eyes.

As I became accustomed to the light I was aware that I was in a square, pink-walled room. In the center of the floor stood a massive pink cube. The cube was the source of a deeper glow, the emanations of which filled the room with the pink light.

"You did not forget." Again I heard no sound, yet my consciousness registered the words, clearly. Somehow I knew they came from the cube. I stared tensely into the cube. For I could see into it as one can see into the gradually solidifying depths of a deep pool of liquid.

But the heart of the cube was not solid. It was alive—as flame is alive.

"You did not forget," came again from the cube. "Accordingly you must be disposed of. As all are disposed of who do not forget."

"Forget what?" I mumbled, too dazed to realize the incongruity of conversing with an enormous cube of pink light.

"You did not forget this house, as you call it. The reason is obvious. You underwent an operation upon your brain. By chance, the mental pathways which rendered you susceptible to my suggestions, were disrupted."

Incredible as it seems, the solution to the mystery of the vanishing house smote me like a blow. The little pink house, in which I now stood had always been there. Upon the numerous occasions that we had burst happily into the clearing, we had seen its shining pinkness confronting us. We had been alarmed. We had fearfully examined it, had attempted to solve its presence. We had done the same thing as we did that morning, believing it to be the first time.

Intermittently we had forgotten it as we picnicked and played. And all the time that Thing, that sinister cube, was somehow watching us, was instilling into our brains by some weird telepathic force, the suggestion that we would forget everything about the pink house at a designated instant. That we would remember only that we had gone to the grove, had eaten our lunch, had plucked a flower, had enjoyed ourselves.

**T**HUS it had been with others who had looked upon the pink house. Perhaps some had fled in terror, then suddenly stopped, sheepishly wondering why they had been running from a pretty glade in a peaceful grove. Perhaps they had retraced their steps, only to again see the house—as for the first time.

But that morning I had remembered.

"Well reasoned," came from the cube. "But there is one point that you do not comprehend. It amuses me to enlighten you, as it might amuse you to direct an ant in the proper path around a twig.

"This house, as you quaintly designate it, is invisible to you until you approach within a dozen yards of it. Certain radiations, which I constantly emit, through these seemingly opaque walls, assure that. If it were not for the concealing trees, you would see it suddenly appear before you, as you approached it. Then, as you retreated, it would as instantly vanish—but you would not be aware that it vanished because you would not be aware that it had appeared. My telepathic suggestion, taking effect at the precise instant that the 'house' vanishes erases all memory of what you have seen from your mind."

"But why? What are—you?" I asked, dreading the answer.

"I am living energy. I, secure in my impregnable barrier, which happens to vaguely resemble one of your houses, have occupied this location for ten thousand of your years."

I stared into the living glow, too numbed to speak.

"We—there are others, many others—are scattered across the entire surface of your Earth, and of the other inhabited planets of your solar system. And of the universe. Where there is life, there are we."

"Where did you come from? How did you—happen to be?" I breathed.

"We do not know. Do you know how you came to exist? You are, then you are not. We always have been. We will always be—so long as there is life to sustain us."

"Life?" I whispered.

"We survive on the energy of living beings. What is your life-span? Seventy years. Why is it not more? Your scientists tell you that a century should not be too much to expect."

"You mean—" I quivered.

"From every living intelligence, in other words, from every human being that approaches us, we absorb a quota of life-force.

of vital energy. It so happens that some never approach us. They are your Centenarians. But most approach us. As I said, we are everywhere."

My mind was a mad whirl. Over all the world, those little pink houses—houses in the sense that they were the abodes of living things, nestled in their pale pinkness. Perhaps I passed one every day, on my way to work. Perhaps I had stared at it, wonderingly, a thousand times, only to forget it instantly, as I moved away from it.

"You wonder," the cube telepathed, "why the 'house' becomes visible, at all. It is matter, of a sort. You can readily imagine the results of your crashing headlong into an invisible wall, in your scurry about your daily affairs. We cannot draw energy from the dead."

I could not speak.

"Are there any further questions?" The cube's mental inquiry seemed to hold an ominous note of finality.

I could think of a thousand unanswered questions, but something was happening to me. I was being drawn, by some terrible, invisible force, into the pink glow of the cube. My head swam, I tried to resist, then the cube disappeared, and blackness took its place.

I became aware that I was free. I was standing before the cube. The hellish pink light, still cast its ghastly radiance over the room. But something had changed. I could not feel.

I glanced down at the floor. Icy horror knifed through me. My body lay, limp and huddled, at my feet! I looked down to where my body should be. There was nothing. My eyes were in their normal position, about five feet ten inches from this floor, but the rest of my body—

"Not your eyes," the cube silently informed me. "Your physical eyes are in that lifeless hulk upon the floor."

"No!" I exclaimed, but the word was not spoken.

"It was necessary that you be disposed of," the cube went on. "For my amusement, I chose this."

"What have you done?" I breathed, from non-existent lungs.

"I have disassociated your mind—or your psyche—from your body. To your own perception, you are the same. You can stand—but you cannot stand. You can see—yet you cannot see. You can only think. You are only a thought. And what you think, you will do. And what you do, will be thought. Thus will it be until Time, itself, comes

to an end. For the psyche is as indestructible as the atoms of which it is formed."

"No, no—" I sobbed brokenly.

"Enough! You are free to go when you wish," the cube told me. "You will find the wall no barrier."

**I** STARED into the weird, relentless depths of that cube, then I turned, avoiding the sight of that huddled form on the floor, and moved slowly toward the shining surface of the wall. I passed through it as through a wall of light.

It was almost dawn. The moon shed its soft radiance upon the dewy glade. I saw the waving shadows of the trees. I did not see my own shadow. The mind does not cast one.

A workman entered the clearing, taking a short cut to his job, as I knew he must have done many times. He stopped, stark incredulity stamp upon his bluff features. Hesitatingly he moved forward, ran his hand over that shining, pink surface.

"Listen!" I screamed wildly. "Don't forget what you've seen here! Do you hear me? Remember!"

Obliviously he turned, hurried away. My voice was but a thought, as was I.

The next few days were as a bitter dream. I wandered, aimlessly, like a leaf that is carried along by the wind. I went once to Dot's home. I will never go again. In time, she will forget.

Today, I found myself in the park. Doing nothing, because there was nothing that I could do. An old man sat on a bench, watching the swans on the lake. As I hovered invisibly near him, starved for even this ghastly travesty of an assuagement to my loneliness, fragments of an article that I had once read darted through my mind—or rather, through me.

The article had discussed the possibility of thought transference. Of implanting one's mind in the body of another, and controlling that individual's actions. A sudden, wild, incredible hope surged through me. I was a mind!

I moved to the bench. Slowly, I settled down into that body. But I was not in it. I could not see from its eyes. I could not feel. His own psyche still controlled his body. I had failed.

Despairingly, I gazed down at him. He smoked unconcernedly, oblivious to the fact that another mind had, for a moment, shared his body. Then, he knocked out his pipe, yawned, leaned back and closed his eyes. He

was asleep.

Sleep! That state when the mind has temporarily relinquished its control of the body. Again, I felt that wild surge of hope. Again, I settled down into that body. Suddenly, I was in. I was breathing! I could hear! I could feel! I lived! His right shoe was too tight. It hurt me. His neck itched. I raised his hand, and scratched it.

I rose from the bench. I walked! I had a body, even though it was a borrowed one. Now, I could make my plans, find some way to fight the cubes!

Abruptly, I realized that the old man stood in front of me, glancing bewilderedly around. His eye fell on the bench, where he had dropped off to sleep. He looked frightened, shuffled rapidly away.

Despair gripped me. He had awakened. Instantly, his own psyche had regained control of his body, leaving mine floating intangibly in space. It was only during sleep, that I could control a person's body.

And sleep, even the deepest sleep, is broken at intervals, by brief awakenings. If I entered a sleeping body, and attempted to combat the cubes, I could expect that person, to awaken, look about in horror, then flee madly away, at any critical moment.

My plan was an impossibility.

I resumed my hopeless drifting, tormented by the knowledge, that I would be so drifting, when the Universe, itself, had disrupted into cosmic dust. Time, for me, would have just begun.

Held to the confines of the city, by a vague reluctance to leave familiar scenes, I found myself wandering purposelessly along a little side street. It was late evening. A light glowed in the window of one of the row of darkened houses. I was drawn to it.

Just inside the window, a man sat at a desk, busily operating a typewriter. I entered the room, looked over his shoulder. He was copying a manuscript. The desk was littered with writer's materials. Paper, envelopes, stamps.

As I stared at him, a sudden, staggering thought gripped me. Perhaps I could take control of this man's body. Through him, I could write a record of my experiences, place it before the world.

**E**VEN as I looked, the writer's head nodded, dropped to his chest. He had dozed off. Feverishly, I settled down into his body, praying that he would not awaken too soon.

I felt the chair beneath me. I heard a clock ticking on the wall. Again I lived!

I jerked the sheet of paper from the typewriter, hastily inserted a fresh one. I began to type. Page after page flew through the machine.

I wrote what you, the reader, have read up till now. Now, I sit here in this stranger's body, thinking. Intermittently, I type my thoughts and actions.

The question is, how best to get this record before the proper eyes. From a stack of magazines, on the desk, I select the one which a careful perusal would indicate to be best suited for my purpose. It is entitled, **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**.

The editor, I dare say, will believe it to be a fiction story. He will be wrong. The majority of the readers will believe it to be fiction.

They, too, will be wrong.

I know that there are a few, with unprejudiced minds, who carefully weigh the evidence, before turning away from the seemingly preposterous. It is to you, that I appeal, in the hope that you may find some means to do what I cannot do. Destroy the pink cubes.

You will see the little pink houses. You see them often. They are all around you. You must remember where they are! But, be careful. I remembered!

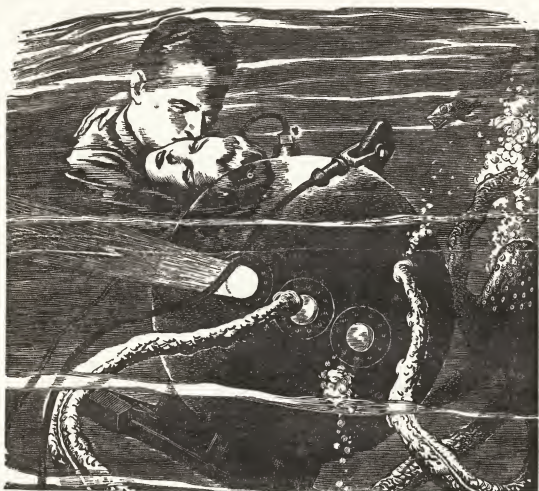
That is all. I shall place these typed pages in a stamped envelope, and carry it to the corner mail-box. Then, I shall return here, shed this sleeping stranger's body, and go—to wander the lonely void, until Time has ceased to be.

It strikes me that I do not even know the name of this person, through whose body, I have been enabled to write this. From papers on his desk, I learn that he is Wilm Carver. I shall type that name under the title of this record, which I have chosen to call, **YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE**.

One thing more. When I have gone, and Carver awakens, he will know nothing of what has occurred. He will be unaware that he wrote or mailed this narrative, for it was not he who wrote it, but I.

What will he think, when he receives a letter from the editor? How will he react? Will he believe himself to be the hapless victim of sorcery? Or, will he presume that he must have written it during a period of abstraction?

I trust that when he sees it in print, he will understand, and believe—and remember!



I swung the Object upward again toward the surface

# DE PROFUNDIS

By MURRAY LEINSTER

*Sard, the Mighty Philosopher, Risks Both Life and Soul in a Visit to the Surface Where He Encounters Incredible Conditions!*

**I** SARD, make report to the Shadi during Peace Tides. I have made a journey of experiment suggested by the scientist Morpt after discussing with me an Object fallen into Honda from the Surface. I fear that my report will not be accepted as true. I therefore await the consensus on my sanity, offering this report to be judged science or delirium as the Shadi may elect . . .

I was present when the Object fell. At the moment I was in communication with

the scientist Morpt as he meditated upon the facts of the universe. He was rather drowsy, and his mind was more conscientious than inspiring as he reflected—for the benefit of us, his students—upon the evidence for the Caluphian theory of the universe, that it is a shell of solid matter filled with water, which being naturally repelled from the center acquires pressure, and that we, the Shadi, live in the region of greatest pressure. He almost dozed off as he reflected for our instruction that this

theory accounts for all known physical phenomena except the existence of the substance gas, which is neither solid nor liquid and is found only in our swim-bladders. For this reason it is commonly assumed to be our immortal part, rising to the center of the universe when our bodies are consumed, and there exists forever.

As he meditated, I recalled the Morpt exercises, by which a part of this gas may be ejected from a Shadi body and kept in an inverted receptacle while the body forms a new supply in the swim-bladder. I waited anxiously for Morpt's trenchant reasoning which denies that a substance—however rare and singular—which can be kept in a receptacle or replaced by the body can constitute its vital essence.

These experiments of Morpt's have caused great disturbance among scientific circles. At the moment, however, he was merely a drowsy instructor, sleepily thinking a lecture he had thought a hundred times before. He was a little annoyed by a sharp rock sticking into his seventh tentacle, which was not quite uncomfortable enough to make him stir.

I lay in my cave, attending anxiously. Then, abruptly, I was aware that something was descending from above. The instinct of our race to block out thought-transference and seize food before anyone else can know of it, operated instantly. I flowed out of my cave and swept to the space below the Object. I raised my tentacles to snatch it. The whole process was automatic—mind-block on, spatial sensation extended to the fullest, full focused reception of mental images turned upon the sinking Object to foresee its efforts to escape so that I could anticipate them—but every Shadi knows what one does by pure instinct when a moving thing comes within one's ken.

**T**HERE were two causes for my behavior after that automatic reaction, however. One was that I had fed, and lately. The other was that I received mental images from within the Object which were startlingly tuned to the subject of Morpt's lecture and my own thoughts of the moment. As my first tentacle swooped upon the descending thing, instead of thoughts of fright or battle, I intercepted the message of an entity, cogitating despairingly, to another.

"My dear, we will never see the Surface again," it was thinking.

And I received a dazzling impression of

what the Surface was like. Since I shall describe the Surface later, I omit a description of the mental picture I then received. But it gave me to pause, I believe fortunately. For one thing, had I swept the Object into my maw as instinct impelled, I believe I would have had trouble digesting it. The Object, as I soon discovered, was made of that rare solid substance which only appears in the form of artifacts. One such specimen has been repeatedly described by Glor. It is about half the length of a Shadi's body, hollow, pointed at one end, with one of its sides curiously flat with strangely shaped excrescences, openings, and two shafts and one hollow tube sticking out of it.\*

As I said, the Object was made of this rare solid material. My spatial sense immediately told me that it was hollow. Further, that it was filled with gas! And then I received conflicting mental images which told me that there were two living creatures within it! Let me repeat—there were two living entities within the Object, and they lived in gas instead of water!

I was stunned. For a long time I was not really aware of anything at all save the thoughts of the creatures within the Object. I held the Object firmly between two of my tentacles, dazed by the impossible facts I faced. I was most incautious. I could have been killed and consumed in the interval of my bewilderment. But I came to myself and returned swiftly to my cave, carrying the Object with me. As I did so, I was aware of startled thoughts.

"We've hit bottom—no! Something has seized us. It must be monstrous in size. It will soon be over, now . . ."

Not in answer, but separately, the other entity thought only emotional things I cannot describe. I do not understand them at all. They represented a psychology so alien to ours that there is no way to express them. I can only say that the second entity was in complete despair, and therefore desired intensely to be clasped firmly in the other entity's two tentacles. This would constitute complete helplessness, but it was what the second creature craved. I report the matter, with no attempt to explain it.

While flowing into my cave, I knocked the Object against the top of the opening. It was a sharp blow. I had again an impression of despair.

"This is it!" the first creature thought, and

\* Query: Is this a description of a ship? Would the one flat side be a deck, the openings hatches, and the excrescences deck-houses, masts and a funnel?

looked with dread for an inpouring of water into the gas-filled Object.

Since the psychology of these creatures is so completely inexplicable, I merely summarize the few mental images I received during the next short period which served to explain the history of the Object.

To begin with, it had been a scientific experiment. The Object was created to contain the gas in which the creatures lived, and to allow the gas to be lowered into the regions of pressure. The creatures themselves were of the same species, but differed in a fashion for which we have no thought. One thought of itself as a man, the other as a woman. They did not fear each other. They had accompanied the Object for the purpose of recording their observations in regions of pressure. To make these observations the Object was suspended by a long tentacle from an artifact like the one of Glor's description.\*\*

When they had observed, they were to have been returned to the artifact. Then the gas was to be released and they would rejoin their fellows. The fact that two creatures could remain together with safety for both is strange enough. But their thoughts told me that forty or fifty others of the same species awaited them on the artifact, all equally devoid of the instinct to feed upon each other.

This appears impossible, of course, and I merely report the thought-images I received. However, while at the full length of the tentacle which held it, the tentacle broke. The Object therefore sank down into the regions of pressure in which we Shadi live. As it neared solidity, I reached up and grasped it, and miraculously did not swallow it. I could have done so with ease.

When, in my cave, I had attended for some time to the thoughts coming from within the Object, I tried to communicate. First, of course, I attempted to paralyze the creatures with fear. They did not seem to be aware of the presence of mind. I then attempted, more gently, to converse with them. But they seemed to be devoid of the receptive faculty. They are rational creatures, but even with no mind-block up they are completely unaware of the thoughts of others. In fact, their thoughts were plainly secret from each other.

I tried to understand all this, and failed. At long last a proper humility came to me

and I sent out a mental call to Morpt. He was still drowsily detailing the consequences of the Caluph theory—that in the center of the universe the gas which has escaped from the swim-bladders of dead Shadi has gathered to form a vast bubble, and that the border between the central bubble and the water is the legendary Surface.

Legends of the Surface are well-known. Morpt reflected, in sleepy irony, that if gas is the immortal part of Shadi, then since two Shadi who see each other instantly fight to the death, the bubble at the center of the universe must be the scene of magnificent combat. But his irony was lost upon me. I interrupted to tell him of the Object and what I had already learned from it.

I immediately felt other minds crowd me. All of Morpt's pupils were instantly alert. I blanked out my mind with more than usual care—to avoid giving any clue to the whereabouts of my cave—and served science to the best of my ability. I told, freely, everything I knew.

**U**NDER other conditions I would have been proud of the furor I created. It seemed that every Shadi in the Honda joined the discussion. Many, of course, said that I lied. But I was fed, and filled with curiosity. I did not reveal my whereabouts to those challengers. I waited. Even Morpt tried to taunt me into an incautious revelation, and went into a typical Shadi rage when he failed. But Morpt is experienced and huge. I could not hope to be the one to live, did we meet each other outside of the Peace Tides.

Once I had proved I could not be lured out, however, Morpt discussed the matter dispassionately and in the end suggested the journey from which I have just returned. If, despite my caution where other Shadi were concerned—all of Morpt's pupils will recognize the challenging irony with which he thought this—if, despite my caution, I was not afraid to serve science, he advised me to carry the Object back to the Heights. From the creatures within it I should receive directions. From their kind I had my strength and ferocity as protections. From the Heights themselves, Morpt urged his exercises as the only possible safeguard.

As I knew, said Morpt, the gas in our swim-bladders expands as pressure lessens. Normally, we have muscles which control it so that we can float in pursuit of our prey, or sink to solidity at will. But he told me that as I neared the Heights I could find the pressure growing so small that in theory

\*\* Query: The bathysphere was suspended by a long cable from a ship?



even my muscles would be unable to control the gas. Under such conditions I must use the Morpt exercises and release a portion of it. Then I could descend again.

Otherwise I might actually be carried up by my own expanding gas, it might rupture my swim-bladder and invade other body cavities and expand still further, and finally carry me with it up to the Surface and the central bubble of Caluph's theory.

In such a case, Morpt assured me wittily, I would become one Shadi who knew whether Caluph was right or not, but I would not be likely to return to tell about it. Still, he insisted, if I paused to use his exercises whenever I felt unusually buoyant, I could certainly carry the Object quite near the Surface without danger, and so bring back conclusive evidence of the truth or error of the entire Caluphian cosmology, thus rendering a great service to science. The thoughts coming from within the Object should be of great assistance in the enterprise.

I immediately determined to make the journey. For one thing, I was not too sure that I could keep my whereabouts hidden if continually probed by older and more experienced minds. Only exceedingly powerful minds like those of Morpt and the other instructors can risk exposure to constant hungry inspection. Of course, they find the profit in their instructorships in such slips among their students . . .

It would be distinctly wise for me to leave my cave, now that I had called attention to myself. So I put up my mind-block tightly and with the Object clutched in one tentacle I flowed swiftly up the slope which surrounds Honda before other Shadi should think of patrolling it for me—and each other.

**I** WENT far above my usual level before I paused. I went so high that the gas in my swim-bladder was markedly uncomfortable. I did the Morpt exercises until it was released. It was strange that I did this with complete calm. But my curiosity was involved, now, and we Shadi are inveterate seekers. So I found it possible to perform an act—the deliberate freeing of a part of the contents of my swim-bladder—which would have filled past generations of Shadi with horror.

Morpt was right. I was able to continue my ascent without discomfort. More, with increasing Height, I had much for my mind to think of. The two creatures—the man and woman—in the Object were bewildered by what had happened to their container.

"We have risen two thousand feet from our greatest depth," the man said to the woman.

"My dear, you don't have to lie to me to make me brave," the woman said. "I don't mind. I couldn't have kept you out of the bathysphere, and I'd rather die with you than live without you."

Such thoughts do not seem compatible with intelligence. A race with such a psychology would die out. But I do not pretend to understand.

I continued upward until it was necessary to perform the Morpt exercises again. The necessary movements shook the Object violently. The creatures within speculated hopelessly upon the cause. These creatures not only lack the receptive faculty, so that their thoughts are secret from each other, but apparently they have no spatial sense, no sense of pressure, and apparently fail of the cycle of instincts which is so necessary to us Shadi.

In all the time of my contact with their minds, I found no thought of anything approximating the Peace Tides, when we Shadi cease altogether to feed and, therefore, instinctively cease to fear each other and intermingle freely to breed. One wonders how their race can continue without Peace Tides, unless their whole lives are passed in a sort of Peace Tides. In that case, since no one feeds during Peace Tides, why are they not starved to death? They are inexplicable!

They watched their instruments as the ascent went on. Instruments are artifacts which they use to supplement their defective senses.

"Four thousand feet up," said the man to the woman. "Only Heaven knows what has happened!"

"Do you think there's a chance for us?" the woman said yearningly.

"How could there be?" the man demanded bitterly. "We sank to eighteen thousand feet. There is still almost three miles of water over our heads, and the oxygen won't last forever. I wish I hadn't let you come. If only you were safe!"

Four thousand feet—whatever that term may mean—above the Honda the character of living things had changed. All forms of life were smaller, and their spatial sense seemed imperfect. They were not aware of my coming until I was actually upon them. I kept two tentacles busy snatching them as I passed. Their body lights were less brilliant than those of the lesser creatures of the Honda.

I continued my flowing climb toward the Surface. From time to time I paused to perform the Morpt exercises. The volume of gas I released from my swim-bladder was amazing. I remember thinking in somewhat the ironic manner of Morpt himself that if every Shadi possessed so vast an immortal part, the central bubble must be greater than Honda itself! The creatures inside the Object now watched their instruments incredulously.

"We are up to nine thousand feet," said the man dazedly. "We dropped to eighteen thousand, the greatest depth in this part of the world."

The thought "world" approximates the Shadi conception of "universe," but there are puzzling differences.

"We've risen half of it again," the man added.

"Do you think that the ballast dropped off and we will float to the Surface?" asked the woman anxiously.

The thought of "ballast" was of things fastened to the Object to make it descend, and that if they were detached the Object would rise. This would seem to be nonsense, because all substances descend except gas. However, I report only what I sensed.

"But we're not floating," said the man. "If we were, we'd rise steadily. As it is, we go up a thousand feet or so and then we're practically shaken to death. Then we go up another thousand feet. We're not floating. We're being carried. But only the fates know by what or why."

**T**HIS, I point out, is rationality. They knew that their rise was unreasonable. My curiosity increased. I should explain how the creatures knew of their position. They have no spatial sense, nor any sense of pressure. For the latter they used instruments—artifacts—which told of their ascent. The remarkable thing is that they inspected those instruments by means of light which they did not make themselves. The light was also made by an artifact. And this artificial light was strong enough to be reflected, not only perceptibly, but distinctly, so that the instruments were seen by reflection only.

I fear that Kanth, whose discovery that light is capable of reflection made his scientific reputation, will deny that any light could be powerful enough to make unlighted objects appear to have light, but I must go even further. As I learned to share not only consciously formed thoughts but sense-

impressions of the creatures in the Object, I learned that, to them, light has different qualities. Some lights have qualities which to them are different from other lights.

The light we know, they speak of as "bluish." They know additional sorts which they term "red" and "white" and "yellow" and other terms. As we perceive differences in the solidity of rocks and ooze, they perceive differences in objects by the light they reflect. Thus, they have a sense which we Shadi have not. I am aware that Shadi are the highest possible type of organism, but this observation—if not insanity—is important matter for meditation.

But I continued to flow steadily upward, pausing only to perform the necessary Morpt exercises to release gas from my swim-bladder when its expansion threatened to become uncontrollable. As I went higher and ever higher, the man and woman were filled with emotions of a quite extraordinary nature. These emotions were unbearably poignant to them, and it is to be doubted that any Shadi has ever sensed such sensations before. Certainly the emotion they call "love" is inconceivable to a Shadi except by reception from such a creature. It led to peculiar vagaries. For example, the woman put her twin tentacles about the man and clung to him with no effort to rend or tear.

"Darling!" she told him, filled with this strange sensation. "It's a miracle! Maybe a sea-serpent is carrying us up. We'll see the Surface again! We'll see the sky and the sun! And we'll have each other for always . . ."

The idea of two creatures of the same species pleasurably anticipating being together without devouring each other—except during the Peace Tides, of course—is almost inconceivable to a Shadi. However, it appeared to be part of their normal psychology.

But this report grows long. I flowed upward and upward. The creatures in the Object experienced emotions which were stronger and ever stronger, and more and more remarkable. Successively the man reported to the woman that they were but four thousand of their "feet" below the Surface, then two thousand, and then one. I was now completely possessed by curiosity. I had barely performed what turned out to be the last needed Morpt exercise and was moving still higher when my spatial sense suddenly gave me a new and incredible message. Above me there was a barrier to its operation.

I cannot convey the feeling of finding a

barrier to one's spatial sense. I was aware of my surroundings in every direction, but at a certain point above me there was suddenly—nothing! Nothing! At first it was alarming. I flowed up half my length, and the barrier grew nearer. Cautiously—even timorously—I flowed slowly nearer and nearer.

"Five hundred feet," said the man inside the Object. "My, Heaven, only five hundred feet! We should see glimmers of light through the ports. No, it's night, now . . ."

I paused, debating. I was close enough to this barrier to reach up my first tentacle and touch it. I hesitated a long time. Then I did touch it. Nothing happened. I thrust my tentacle boldly through. It went into Nothingness. Where it was there was no water. With an enormous emotion I realized that above me was the central bubble, and that I, alone of living Shadi, had reached and dared to touch it. The sensation in my tentacle within the bubble, above the Surface, was that of an enormous weight, as if the gas of departed Shadi would have thrust me back. But they did not attack, they did not even attempt to injure me.

**Y**ES, I was splendidly proud. I felt like one who has overcome and consumed a Shadi of greater size than himself. And as I exulted, I became aware of the emotions of the creatures within the Object.

"Three hundred feet!" said the man frantically. "It can't stop here! It can't! My dear, Fate could not be so cruel."

I found pleasure in the emotions of the two creatures. They felt a new emotion, now, which was as strange as any of my other experiences with them. It was an emotion which was the anticipation of other emotions. The woman named it.

"It is insane," she told the man, "but somehow I feel hope again."

And in my pleasure and intellectual interest it seemed a very small thing for one who had already dared so greatly to continue the pleasures I felt. I flowed further up the slope. The barrier to my spatial sense—the Surface—came closer and ever closer.

"A hundred feet," said the man in an emotion which to him was agony, but because of its novelty was a source of intellectual pleasure to me.

I transferred the Object to a forward tentacle and thrust it ahead. It bumped upon the solidity which here approached and actually penetrated the Surface. The man experienced a passion of the strong emotion

called Hope.

"Twenty-five feet," he cried. "Darling, if we start to go down again, I'll open the hatch and we'll go out as the bathysphere floods. I don't know whether we're near shore or not, but we'll try."

The woman was pressed close against him. The agony of hope which filled her was a sensation which mingled with the high elation I felt over my own daring and achievement. I thrust the Object forward yet again. Here the Surface was so near the solidity under it that a part of my tentacle went above the Surface. And the emotions within the Object reached a climax. I thrust on, powerfully, against the weight within the Bubble, until the Object broke the surface, and then on and on until it was no longer in water but in gas, resting upon solidity which was itself touched only by gas.

The man and woman worked frantically within the Object. A part of it detached itself. They climbed out of it. They opened their maws and uttered cries. They wrapped their tentacles about each other and touched their maws together, not to devour, but to express their sensations. They looked about them, dazed with relief, and I saw through their eyes. The Surface stretched away for as far as their senses reported, moving and uneven, and yet flat. They stood upon solidity from which things projected upward. Overhead was a vast blackness, penetrated by innumerable small bright sources of light.

"Thank goodness!" said the man. "To see trees and the stars again . . ."

They felt absolutely secure and at peace, as if in a Peace Tides enhanced a thousandfold. And perhaps I was intoxicated by my own daring, or perhaps by the emotions I received from them. I thrust my tentacles through the Surface. Their weight was enormous, but my strength is great also.

**D**ARINGLY I heaved up my body. I thrust my entire forepart through the Surface and into the central bubble. I was in the central bubble while still alive! My weight increased beyond computation, but for a long, proud interval I loomed above the Surface. I saw with my own eyes—all eighty of them—the Surface beneath me and the patch of solidity on which the man and woman stood. I, Sard, did this!

As I dipped below the Surface again I received the astounded thoughts of the creatures.

"A sea-serpent," thought the man, and

doubted his own sanity as I fear my own will be doubted. "That's what did it."

"Why not, darling?" the woman said calmly. "It was a miracle, but people who love each other as we do simply couldn't be allowed to die."

But the man stared at the Surface where I had vanished. I had caught his troubled thought.

"No one would believe it. They'd say we're insane. But confound it, here's the bathysphere, and our cable did break when we were above the Deep. When we're found, we'll simply say we don't know what happened, and let them try to figure it out."

I lay resting, close to the Surface, thinking many things. After a long time there was light. Fierce, unbearable light. It grew stronger and yet stronger. It was unbearable. I flowed down into the nearer depths.

That was many tides ago, because I dared not return to Honda with so vast a proportion of the gas in my swim-bladder released to the central bubble. I remained not too far below the Surface until my swim-bladder felt normal. I descended again, and again waited until my "immortal part" had replenished itself. It is difficult to feed upon such small creatures as inhabit the Heights. It took a long time for me to make the descent which by Morpt's discovery had been made so readily as an ascent. All my waking time was spent in the capture of food, and I had little time for meditation. I was never once full-fed in all the periods I paused to wait for my swim-bladder to be replenished. But when I re-

turned to my cave, it had been occupied in my absence by another Shadi. I fed well.

Then came the Peace Tides. And now, having bred, I lay my report upon my journey to the surface at the service of all the Shadi. If I am decreed insane, I shall say no more. But this is my report. Now determine, O Shadi: Am I mad? Tell me . . .

**I**, MORPT, in Peace Tides, having heard the report of Sard, and having consulted with others of the Shadi, do declare that he has plainly confounded the imagined with the real.

His description of the scientific aspects of his journey which are not connected with the assumed creatures in the Object, are consistent with science. But it is manifestly impossible that any creature could live with its fellows permanently, without the instinct to feed. It is manifestly impossible that creatures could live in gas. Distinction between light and light is patent nonsense. The psychology of such creatures as described by Sard is of the stuff of dreams.

Therefore, it is the consensus that Sard's report is not science. He may not be insane, however. The physiological effects of his admitted journey to great Heights have probably caused disorders in his body which have shown themselves in illusions. The scientific lessons to be learned from this report is that journeys to the Heights, though possible because of the exercises invented by myself, are extremely unwise and should never be made by Shadi. Given during the Peace Tides . . .



*"I'm Not Really the Devil as Your Ad Requested—  
but My Firm Can Give You Practically  
the Same Service!"*

**T**HAT WAS how Horace Twemby introduced himself to Professor Hux Bradley, who had advertised for demons—and from that moment on the things that happen to Hux are just out of this world! New vistas of fantasy will open before your eyes when you read **DEVILS FROM DARKONIA**, by Jerry Shelton, in which Hux lives through a mysterious transformation and some of the zaniest, funniest adventures that have ever seen print!

**DEVILS FROM DARKONIA** is really a different story—a "must" for every science fiction fan. It packs howls—and thrills—from the first page to the last!

**COMING NEXT ISSUE**

## THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

Open letter to D. Donnell—Glad that mix-up is cleared up. My tendrils were twitching in confusion. Your art is swell; keep it up. Used the word "up" too much, didn't I? Onward.

Hunter, in spite of listing stories, had a good letter. His comments show much thought. Nice going, Gene, ole man. Yeah.

Won't even mention Austin Hamel. He never mentions me. Hey, Aust, muh fran, mebbe we can work up a deal next time I see you. . . Yes? You mention my name every time you write TWS, and I'll do same for you.

Excuse business transactions.

Humorous typographical error of the month department: In J. M. Gibelson's letter. April 1949 issue instead of April 1939. Haw!

Open letter to Tom Pace: Mr. Pace, sir, I shall have U know that I am better artist than cartoon in TWS would have one believe. You doubt? You scoff? Tutti Fish-posh. Sneer. Come up sometime and see my etchings. So I am a screwball. Faughhh—'tis more than obvious.

BUT—Who is scientifiction's number one letter hack? Could it be Chad Oliver? What an absurd thought! Could it be Milt Lesser? Ho. I laugh right in your faces, I laugh. Could it be Jay Chidsey, Ray Karden or G. Waible??? Impossible. Incredible, incomprehensible, sputter, sputter, sputt. The answer is only too obvious. It is established fact. The top letter hack is Joe Kennedy! Ha. I knew it all along. My poetry, I shall inform you to know, is flawless. Give heed—

The demon sped thru the atmosphere

On horrid wings of night;

He had obtained a job with an advertising

company.

And attached to his tail was a sign reading,  
"Drink Blotz Beer, because it's so mellow and  
light." (FINIS)

Before closing, allow me to congratulate Margaret Montague, Bill Hesson, and George W. Frank for exceptionally fine letters, and to pat on the back Norman Green, John A. Nicholas, Horace Hervey and Robert Schick for worthwhile stuff too.

This, I fear, is quite enough.—Dover, New Jersey.

In spite of the coy spelling, Kiwi Kennedy, which had the old Sarge screaming for Xeno and covering his eyes with his flippers until the horrid letters went away, it's nice to have you picking on your fellow correspondents instead of on ye Sarge. But when it comes to your somewhat pedantic remarks to Pee-plot Pace, concerning your misbegotten talents as a Michael Angelo of the interplanetary realms, ye Sarge, as victim No. 1, has still got to be shown.

## COME THE HUNGRY CRITICS

By Chad Oliver

Dear Sarge: It's been some time since I last sent a spacegram winging on its merry way to TWS, but your respite is over. All good things, even silence, must come to an end, quoth the soothsayers. And it seems that Merlin and his mob hit things pretty much on the nose—I'm back with a report on the Fall TWS. Let's slash our dynamic way into the cover first, shall we?

Some possibly well-meaning, but obviously misguided soul released Brother Belarski from solitary, I see. And with the usual result. Mr. Belarski can do excellent work, and has in the past, but he seems to have a peculiar aversion to it. Once every five or six tries he comes up with a good painting, and in between he ghoulishly paints headless horrors and writhing serpents putting their foul clutches on what appears to be a fugitive from a futuristic swimming pool. This month's cover, needless to relate, was one of those "in between" times.

In the fictional realm, my candidate for top honors is "The Ultimate Analysis," by John Russell Fearn. This one really had a lot of thought behind it, and though I don't happen to agree with the perfect mathematical equation theory, it was well worked-out

and thought-provoking, besides being an entertaining story. It seems to me that the perfect equation would be just like any other true equation—a series of figures on paper. Where all the beams and circles of power come from is a little beyond me. But let's see more of Fearn.

Murray Leinster snares the runner-up spot with "The Eternal Now." I've always liked Leinster, and this story was worthy of him.

Next, "The Last Man in New York," by Paul MacNamara. This was nicely, if not graphically, done. I think it could have been better, and that very easily, but as it is MacNamara has a darned good story to his credit.

Fourth place I herewith bestow on Tooker's "Mongrovia Caravan," which pushes the MacNamara yarn for the number three position. If Tooker would only do a novel for you on the order of "The Day Of the Brown Horde!" That would be something.

Ray Cummings manages to get fifth place for "The Gadget Girl" by virtue of being able to turn out good work almost without intending to. But surely Ray has more to offer than these Tubby things—why waste an author like Cummings?

The amateur story, "Bloated Brain," by Alfred G. Kuehn, comes next. Sub-standard for the amateur department, I'm afraid.

Last, least and lowest we find none other than Frank Belknap Long. Whatever prompted Long to write such tripe as "Beyond the Vortex" I don't know, but it was certainly an evil impulse.

The interior pix were up to standard this time. The best, a really striking drawing, was for "The Last Man in New York." The same artist (Donnell?) paced the issue with the work for the Leinster and Fearn stories. I was certainly glad to see Schomburg back, although his pic for "The Gadget Girl" was mediocre at best. But hang on to Alex; he's one of the better artists around today. Marchioni is still doing his usual dull studies of men and women dressed in formless linoleum, surrounded by casual ink-spots.

"The Reader Speaks" was good, as usual. But I have a mild sort of complaint to make. It's purely a personal dislike, but I definitely do not care for involved science discussions in letters. The same applies to editorials. Ask anyone who has ever worked on a newspaper and you'll find that editorials are about the least read items in the paper. And that when they are written by experts. I don't mind editorial writing myself, but I feel that "The Reader Speaks" isn't the place for it. As I said, this is purely a personal peeve; perhaps I'm mistaken.

I see where Mr. Brown doesn't like Brackett. I must confess that I kinda liked his letter, but I don't agree with the sentiments expressed in his poem. To further my cause, I too submit a poem:

Ye Brown hath dislike for Brackett,

He sayeth that with words

She doth hack it.

But Ye Chad hath fondness for Brackett,

And sayeth that when gripes appear

Ye Sarge should read, then sack it.

All of which should wind up this rather lengthy epistle in a sufficiently hideous manner.—Galveston, Texas.

Ye oldde Sarge is going to leave you and Kiwi Kennedy to fight out the letter policy of TWS with fountain pens at fifty paces—and don't squirt ink in each other's eyes. Just keep the letters coming. And as to your unimbecic comment on Mr. Brown's opinion of Leigh Brackett, well—

When Oliver assails the keys

And Sherman Brown for blasting Brackett

All meter he evades

His rhyming scheme has grown a wheeze

Pentameter, he seems to lack it.

He really slinks in spades.

However, Chaddo, morally we're with you all the way. Ia Leigh is one of our pets—and not of the Eek and Oog variety, if you remember her photograph in a recent STORY

(Turn page)

**BEHIND THE STORY.** Oh, oh—back to work. Here's Wartears, with that look in his many-faceted eyes. Quick, Frog-eyes, the Xeno,

## MIXED GREENS

By Frederick Emil Warth, Junior

Dear Sarge: It is now the year 3988, and as I dust off this ancient issue of **THRILLING WONDER STORIES** (fall 1944) and thumb through the pages, I find, surprising enough, that all the scientific "non-sense" were really predictions, because we have achieved everything except the Time Machine, which is an utter impossibility. We even drink Xeno every day as you drank soft drinks back in the 20th century. (Don't ask me how I'm sending you this letter if the Time Machine is impossible.)

Well, guess it's about time I told, or rather tear your mag apart! So—here goes!

Cover: I think the snake is drawn better than anything else on the cover. But must you have the same old covers??

The interior art was very good, but doesn't seem to fit into an STF mag.

"Bloated Brain," for some reason, appealed to me. "The Eternal Now" was good, but every time I turned around some guy ground his teeth or said something about Einstein. On top of that, most of your stories dealt with the fourth dimension or another vibrational plane. Anyhow, I liked all the stories.—Savannah, Georgia.

## MIXED GREENLEAF

By Emile E. Greenleaf, Jr.

Dear Sarge: I'm back again, and whether you like it or not I intend to comment on the Fall '44 TWS.

Cover: So-so. But at least the druggist didn't have to spray perfume around the mag stand to kill the odor.

The inside pics weren't so hot. Stories: (1) "Eternal Now." (2) "Ultimate Analysis." Reminded me of "Devouring Tide" but was somewhat better. (3) "Bloated Brain."

Well! Well! For once a Tubby yarn that didn't smell as if it had come from the garbage can. However, it's nothing to rave over.

And now—wv, my deah Sarge, comes *eeeyaaahaa-haah!*, the Yearly Report! Now, now. Screaming won't help you. Yer gonna lissen. See?

Here goes:

(1) "The Eternal Now." Excellent. More by Leinster.

(2) "Star of Treasure." Harbaugh is another darn good author who should appear in TWS more.

(3) "The Veil of Astellar." Definitely, I say, More by Brackett.

(4) "A God Named Kroo." Though a fantasy, I really enjoyed this story. By Kuttner, incidently.

(5) "The Ultimate Analysis." Fearn turned out a nice little bundle of sif.

(6) "Devouring Tide." Polton Cross may yet become one of sciencifiction's greats.

(7) "Trophy." So Scott Morgan is a newcomer? Tell him to stick around, so the fans can get acquainted with him.

(8) "Priestess of Pakmarl." What I said about Brackett goes also for DePina.

(9) "Swing Your Lady." Where in heck were you been keeping Kelvin Kent lately? Dig him up and tell him to write Pete Manx yarns till the fans tire of them. And as far as I am concerned, that means that he will be writing till his dying day.

(10) "Terror in the Dust." In general it was corny, but the swell way in which it was handled made it very entertaining.

The best cover for the year was Bergey's for the Spring ish, followed by Belarski's for the current ish. The best interior illustration was Enlay's on page 99 of the winter ish, illustrating "Space Command," followed by Donnelly for "Priestess of Pakmarl."

Just a minute Sarge, before I go. I think that Ruth Washburn and Alfred G. Kuehn have possibilities. I, and no doubt many other fans, would like to see more of their work gracing TWS' pages.

See yuh later, Xeno-sponge.—New Orleans, Louisiana.

Xeno-sponge, eh? Just for that, bring on another jug, Snaggletooth. You might as well

make yourself useful after exposing us to Wart-ears' mournful vituperations. Tell him to pipe down. I've already explained the error. . . Oh, he says there is a plethora of Wart-tears on Terra, does he? . . . For once, let him have a jug of his own while I get back to the letters. Tell him not to take himself so consarnedly seriously. Okay, just keep shut!

## ON THE ACID SIDE

By Richard Rosen

Dear Sarge: Try, try again is my motto. Here goes.

I see you have given Bergey a rest at last. The cover seems to depict an armour-plated female kicking someone's skull around while the Headless Horseman (sans horse) and a mile-long cobra (?) become very nasty and attempt to dismember yon damsel. Belarski probably doesn't sleep at night after that one. "The Eternal Now"—well, at least the lush redhead compensates some for the tortuous time trying to unravel Mr. Leinster's scientific explanations. It is breathed that a sequel is forthcoming. Oh, no!

"The Last Man in New York"—I've often thought about this. I wonder what I would do if that happened to me. Thank you, Mr. MacNamara, for the best story in the magazine.

"The Bloated Brain"—phooey! The worst story I've read in a long time.

"Beyond the Vortex"—Why waste paper on junk like that? Thought images, magnetic excavators, cubo-octahedrons and driver ants all combine to make this story second only to the above mentioned tripe in marvelously-worded gibberish.

"Mongrovia Caravan"—Just fair.

That thing by Cummings—Cut it out, will you, Sarge. Does anyone like the Tubby series?

"The Ultimate Analysis"—Coltham's machine was intriguing, but otherwise the story just rambled—the end in particular.

"The Reader Speaks"—Good as always, though it would be more interesting (to me) if this was printed in it. First place goes to Bill Hesson for his defense of Science.

Margaret Montague's letter and your answer are both "urbal, urbal". By the way Sarge, that's a good photograph of you on page six.

Sherman Brown (3rd) can go down himself. Leigh Brackett is one of the best science-fiction authors today. No doubt you are a Cummings fan Mr. Brown. No Cummlins fan can appreciate beautiful work like Miss Brackett's. Their minds have been dulled by years of reading Cummings' coarse stuff. I would like to start an anti-Cummings crusade. It is not necessary to write poems knocking Cummings, his work does an even better job.

So long.—New York City.

Kiwi Rosen certainly doesn't pull his punches. Not where Belarski and frere Cummings are concerned. Ye oldde Sarge is amazed that he spared this department. How come, Richard? Did you run out of corrosives, or is your vocabulary limited to assaults on those who can't throw the lie direct right back at you—like ye Sarge?

Well, cover-carpers are never satisfied. What they did to poor Bergey and his pelucid flesh tones and super-bems hardly could bear reprinting—even in **THE READER SPEAKS**. Now they've got Belarski, and listen to the howls spanning space from Terra, past ye Sarge's current camp on Uranus into the outer galactic regions. Methinks they like to carp, no matter what.

## XENO TO NEWCASTLE

By T. C. Lusk, Jr.

Dear Sarge: Having read TWS for several years (Turn to page 102)



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now, I figured it's about time I stuck my two-bits worth into the readers column.

First off, the ratings on the stories in the Fall ish:

The Eternal Now.....3.5

The Last Man in New York.....3.2

Mongrovia Caravan.....3.0

The Ultimate Analysis.....2.5

The rest, including Tubby, aren't even good filler. They left me cold as the dark side of Mercury. As for the art work, all the inside pics were good with the exception of Marchioni; maybe he'd do better on spaceships, etc. Belarski's cover was swell, but why not more rockets and space scenes for a change.

Whatever happened to the old slip-stick STF of the Gernsback and Weinbaum era? There was really science in the science-fiction of those days. Nelson Bond is one of the few who can turn it out like that now, and he's off to the wars. The same goes for the artwork of Leydenfrost; there are very few who come close to him in that field, except possibly Finlay.

You're on the ball, Sarge, getting a larger Readers Section and hereby award you a full 10 litres of Xeno, free except for the 20% luxury tax. Too bad some readers have to abuse their privilege of bringing their gripes into the open. (Don't look at me that way!) Let's have more scientific controversy in this column and less griping, boys.

Speaking of controversy, has anyone figured out what we'll do about digestion when we suddenly find that there is no gravity in space to keep our food in the bottom of our stomach long to digest? The same applies to water, which will float around in spherical globules; we might starve with abundance around us. It's a small but important detail.

That's all for now; I want to enjoy the rest of my leave.

Yours for fewer BEM's.—Port Blakely, Washington.

Okay, pee-lot, you get off with only a single from the Cerean sandblaster thanks to being kind to this space dog's efforts to keep the kiwis coming back for more. But what's the idea of cutting down the awards of Xeno from gallon jugs to mere litres? A Mercurian carbuncle upon thee!

And here's a matter for serious fan attention, particularly on the part of those misguided children of Saturnian wart wearers who like to rate the stories in TWS on a point or jug basis. Looking back through the past "for a change" ye olde Sarge has discovered no less than nine (count 'em, 9) different scoring systems.

By the beard of a Ganymedean grass goat, is that a way to rate yarns so that they make sense? The answer is no, a thousand times no! Frog-eyes and Snaggle-tooth have joined in the chorus of nays. Even Wart-ears is lifting the sand-paper product he calls a voice. Seriously, the department is beginning to look worse than a pre-prohibition slot machine now reposing in the waters of New York harbor after one of the Little Flower's anti-gambling drives.

Stories have been rated by critical carphounds in recent issues in something called "Units," in "plums," letters of the A, B, C sort or the whole gamut of the Terrean alphabet or in E for excellent as in grade schools. They have been rated in "Stars," in "Roses," in tens or the 1, 2, 3, system of numbers and in a sort of super rotgut called "Prsxon," foul hobnail liver breeder from some lesser planet.

All of them are wrong. Stories in TWS deserve one system and one alone—jugs, not litres, quarts or gills of Xeno, ye Sarge's

stand-by for more light years than you short-lived Terreans can remember through five generations of pre-natal memory stirring by Lunar psychiatrists, Fie and pooh!

Furthermore, since the recent threatened shortage of ye precious elixir is by no means dissipated (the Xeno, not ye Sarge, you asteroidal idiot, Frog-eyes!) the count will start at ten (10) quarts for a first-class tale. And I will not be so likely to owe any of you a jug or more in case of a stinker. The count absolutely cannot go below zero.

Remember, rate TWS stories from now on in jugs of Xeno (gallon size, nothing smaller accepted) from one to ten. If you kiwis can't count that high, try doing it on your fingers. You have or should have ten, no more, or less, and I'm including thumbs.

No, not you, Snaggletooth—your flippers don't rate in this contest any more than your critical sense. Hounds of Venus, let's get it right from now on, or ye Sarge will be running dry. And Xeno makes the Sarge go, as all good or bad TWS readers must know by now.

## WHO'S SATAN?

By Austin Hamel

Sergeant Satan, er Saturn: There are a number of things I'd like to talk about, so I won't waste paper dabbling around.

One of the main things is the Dovercon. The dovercon was a meeting of twelve fans held at the home of Joe Kennedy in Dover, N. J. Among those present were many names familiar to the pages of TWS, and SS. Sam Moskowitz, Gerry de la Res, Al Weinstein, Russ Wiley, Don and Elsie Wohlheim, Helen Braudluk, Paul Miles, George Fox, Austin Hamel (ahem), and naturally, Kennedy. A good time was had in the wilds of New Jersey. A meal, and picture snapping were the highlights outside of chit-chat.

The other thing is the last issue of TWS. On the cover stands a walking general electric mazda bulb shocking a girl. Ho! Hum! So what if I complain? So what if everybody complains? Does it do any good? No. So I'll shuddup! Insides fair. Can't truthfully say I've read everything, but I did almost enjoy what I did read.

Of course the best that I did read was Leinster's "Eternal Now." An extremely well-written yarn that shows up under the barrage of hack that clutters up the pages ever so often. The idea was quite old, but I generally do like that type of tale. It was lacking something tho. I believe it could have been written in half as many words.

"Last Man in NY" was a cute little yarn, with little or no meaning. Horrible ending. Most likely tried to be surprise. But wasn't at all surprising. Liked mention of NY spots tho.

Couldn't wade thru the shorts. Anyway most of 'em.

A very cute mistake in JM Gibson's letter, "I have just got hold of a rather old copy of your magazine Thrilling Wonder Stories, April 1949." Old he calls it.

Art work: Donnell is good. I have come to a decision that she is about your best at the present. What? Schomberg back? But a very cramped, and poor Schomberg.

Ah! Hunter back in the letter hack dept. Good. Krueger good. Norman Green to the point (Altho the way you cut up his letter, there was hardly room left for a point!).

Ko Tal raised an interesting question. Which makes me think of something that I consider quite interesting. I think it has been brought up numbers of times in many SF magazines, but it seldom was answered sufficiently. What is that inexplicable feeling you get when looking at something, and for that second thinking you remember seeing it before?

Some say it is a lapse of memory for a hundredth of a second and then when you do look at the object that

same second, you seem to think you've seen it. I have no idea if this theory is correct. But, if there are any fans and readers interested, I would like to hear what they think about this phenomenon.

Next December when it is cold and snowy, thousands of readers and fans all over the world will trudge thru the desolation. Through the storms and rains, the sleet, and snow, on, and on, finally to come to the end of their journeys to get, to get, a copy of TWS!—New York City.

Okay, kiwi Ahemel, glad the Kennedy Dovercon was a success. Wish we could have been among those present, but were we invited? No! And could we have come if we were? No! Kiwi Kennedy would have been quite safe in issuing us an invitation, and our ego would have remained unruffled out here on Uranus, where we have come to escape the howls of you alleged fans.

So you're wrestling around with those "I'm Sure I've Been Here Before Again" Blues—otherwise called, "When you were a king in Babylon, and I was a Christian slave."

Funny no one ever remarked that Babylon fell many a long century before the birth of Christianity—even of the slave variety. Maybe some of our inconstant readers will help you out with an explanation. Ye olde Sarge could go on and on and on—so he won't, with other letters to be heard from.

## A DROOLING KRUEGER

By Ken Krueger

Greetings, Most Honorable One: I have a bone to pick with you. You promised us a good story. You had me fairly drooling when I did get the Fall ish. And then it turns out to be such an internal piece of tripe as "The Eternal Now." As a story, it was terrible. I've read stories with errors in them but never one to equal this.

I'll quote from a few spots pp 14 paragraph 7 line 4—"He struck yet another match." How come the match works. It shouldn't if he was keeping in time with the story. Just one more that was a classic. Page 15, Paragraph 3—"Harry Brett pushed his thumb against a call-button. It was immovable. He turned off the flashlight." And yet the flashlight had a push button to it as well. Again—how come?

All this besides the phonograph working. It was really the worst story I've ever read. And to think that this is the same Murray Leinster who wrote "Murder Madness." It seems impossible for a man to be so good then so absolutely rotten. But to get on to pleasant subjects.

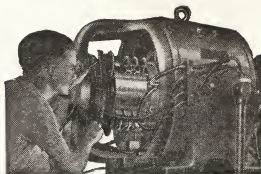
Don't hurry Donnell. It's easy to see what is going on. A picture has to be drawn in as little time as possible so naturally it doesn't turn out so hot. The Donnell pics in this ish in no way live up to the previous ones. And please ask her to sign the pics. I hate to have to guess the artists. And I note you have Rudolph back on the cover. I can't say it's an improvement, for a TWS without Bergey is like spaghetti without meat balls or Abbott without Costello or something.

Honestly tho—the cover is not as good merely because the background is so indistinct. There was no pretty octopus or anything. The snake was good but not as good as the octopus was on the last issue. The wimmen are no good. Either go all the way and have them entirely nude and beautiful or leave them off entirely. And please, No Belarski.

I'll skip over the stories without rating them for, except "The Eternal Now." They were all up to average and quite good. The illustrations were fair. The ads were medium passable, and the features I never read. Except THE READER SPEAKS. On which I shall now dwell.

It was quite interesting this time. The Sarge loves me. He mentioned me three times besides my own letter. But you don't have to tell me about back issues of Wonder as you did after Gibber's letter. Suppose I give you a few pointers on your own mag. Most of which happened long before your birth my friend.

(Turn page)



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The best cover pie you ever had decorated the Feb. 1939 issue, second best was on the Feb. 1936 issue.

Best single issue of TWS was the June 1939 one which had stories by Taine, Weinbaum, Williamson, Keller, Smith, Binder, Kline, The Burroughs Boys, and Cummings. It was also the Tenth anniversary issue of the mag. Best single story ever to appear in wonder was "Dawn to Dusk," which was a three part serial by Eando Binder. It started in the Nov. 1934 ish. Next best was "The Human Termites" by Dr. Keller, also a three-part serial, which started in the Sept. 1929 issue. Third best was "The Time Stream" by Taine, a four-part serial, which started in the Nov. 1931 issue.

The worst cover that was ever used was on the Oct. 1929 issue. It was by Frank R. Paul. This, of course, does not include the off-trail covers, which were dots of various colors which ran together after you looked at them awhile. They were the worst of course, but we are concerned with picture covers.

Best fourth dimension story used was "Death From Within" by Sterling S. Cramer which was overshadowed by "Seeds From Space," which appeared in the same (June 1935) issue. For some reason Manning's "Stranger Club" yarn took first place in the issue. If anyone wants to read "Death From Within" and can't get the original mag, it is to be reprinted in JET by the very kind permission of the editors.

But to get back—top ten in Wonder has been "Dawn To Dusk"—Binder, "The Human Termites"—Keller, "The Time Stream"—Taine, "Green Man of Grey-pec"—Pragnell, "City of the Singing Flame"—Smith, "Beyond the Singing Flame"—Smith, "The Devil's Fiddle"—Mexico (You remember this one of course), "Dawn of Flame"—Weinbaum, "Seeds From Space"—Manning, "Death From Within"—Cramer. I guess that ought to be about enough of that for now. It's been fun for me to go back over the years like this. I must remember to do it more often.

Best letter was by Benson Perry. The others were all good, but I haven't got the time to raise them in order of preference. I might make some enemies. By the way, do you all know that Ben is the editor of CYGNI the newest fanzine out?

This odd wold dept. Just noticed my letter stood third again. As far as I know every time I've had a letter printed it has been in the third spot. Oh, well, think of the guy who likes the octopus.—Buffalo, New York.

Cheer up, Kiwi Krueger, just for variety, we put you in ninth place this issue—or did you notice? As to the pair of minor brodieys you spotted in "The Eternal Now," consider the problems of author and editors in putting such a job together at all, and let thy quibblings cease.

This old space mongrel, however, is still disturbed that you didn't like Belarski's snake after the rave you put on for Bergey's octopus. Shiver my inner plates (not upper, or lower), but you're growing choosey.

Enjoyed your spin through the lurid past of TWS. There were giants in those days. Lucky we still have most of them around. Your evident taste for fantasy should find plenty of comfort in our comparison, SS. Remind ye Sarge to check on that when it comes time to do his stint for that magazine.

# WALKING ON HIS THUMBS!

By George W. Frank

Dear Sarge: Thanks to my cargo of Xeno and TWS copies the Time Travelers' Convention was a grand success. The carrot-juice elixir found particular favor-et-flavor with an old gent named Galileo, who said it would have increased his vision 101% when he was fiddling around with dinky little telescopes.

Copernicus, the old friar, relinquished the convention's presidency because his proposal to oust lady timesters was turned down cold. A mad scramble for the office resulted, even with the ladies (?) watching Winston Churchill bald-headed, but finally H. G. Wells came out victorious when Margaret Ionides reminded the voters that Relativitv Einstein had once

said time travel was impossible. Oh you never heard of that gal? Tsk! Tsk! Her and her old man wrote a great book entitled "Stars and Men."

The party's biggest card was a mergal named Mypodena of Venus, who visited Earth away back in 1944 long enough to bypendate a screwy letter to TWS under a N'Orleans alias. What a queer merman name for a time-machine! Syporonda! Ye cockeyed comet cuties!

There weren't enough TWSes to go round, so the mags were nearly in shreds until a final decision was reached on the worth of the contents. Though I think this ish below par, here's their decision transmuted to carrothmetic.

The TTC slapped 18 carrots on Leinster's "The Eternal Now" for dishing up the kind of time not even timesters can travel in. Frozen time is too much even for the Galaxy Timemaster DeLuxe and too rare for installing Brett nullifiers as regular equipment. The biggest kick is how Dan Cupid split his shirt-tails to instigate the most instantaneous love affair in history!

Second place, 15 carrots each, goes to "Beyond the Vortex" and "The Ultimate Analysis"—the former due to the combined space-time travel, whereby an Andromedan lures a Hollywood star into a future-man's headache. A yarn with a surprise kick, good despite the fumbled nightmares. The majority of Conventers having dabbled in math, even seeking the perfect equation, accounts for the tie, though "The Ultimate Analysis" is definitely built on coincidence.

"The Last Man in New York" steps into third place, after hibernating in the universal bookkeeping department. Fourteen carrots please, solely on the writer's skill, for the scientists don't like puns on the Doomsday Book. Fourth place to Tooker's "Mongrovia Caravan." That literary agent has ladled up a good little yarn—particularly those robot machines with canine sense. Good for 13 carrots, while Cummings' "The Gadget Girl" gets 10—just the usual Tubby standard—and who can imagine what troubles gals won't get guys into next? Four carrots to "The Bloated Brain"—Kuehn can write, but he used the can-opener on the wrong can to suit the TTC delegates.

Well, well, imagine that! Eleven carrots left for the Features instead of the usual 10. So hold your jug, Sarge, while I squeeze the Xeno out of the extra carrot for the comments you annexed to me-own letter.

As for THE READER SPEAKS, that fellow Brown made an error. He meant that "3rd" for "3". His age! Only anyone aged 3 would condemn Brackett so completely, or write such poetry. Or else he's a natural "gal hater."

"I would be natural for that mermaid to gripe about planet yarns, for she simply can't be at home out of the warm Venusian seas.

You're right, Pace, renaming that man-thing a Homo Sap, though hardly a Home Sap the way so many of them are out running hitched women, or vice versa. He knows his poetry—a brickbat on the animal in humanity!

As for artwork, Belarski ain't any Bergey. That dame looks more like a circus ham than a Hollywood babe, or like a puppet on a string. Rate it average. And who drew 'em inside? Only two signed—Marchion's Bloated Brain (rot!) and Schomburg's Gadget Girl (some wow, Tubby's dream-gal!) and that Mona Colbin drawing inside is sure a honey.

So now I'd better slip my Time Sedan into the daredevil gear and see how many old fogeys are waiting for time-taxi service. So long pal, and hurry the construction of your office time-hangar, Sarge.—Butler, Ohio.

Just when ye oldde Sarge sips his Xeno with the happy inner glow that comes of straightening out a reader tangle by labeling one system for official use in criticizing TWS stories in THE READER SPEAKS, along comes Pee-lot Frank with a Carrothmetic count to termite up the works again.

Okay, if you must, but Xeno raters will rate higher in coming issues. After all, nectar awarders display far better critical acumen than those content with dishing up terrestrial rabbit food.

(Turn page)

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## IS THERE A RAY-GUN IN THE HOUSE?

By Guy Trucano, Jr.

Dear Sarge: You can kill the fatted calf, spread the welcome mat, open the Xeno jug, etc. for your dearest admirer has come back to the fold, old spacewarrior, wolf, wolf. I have been grieved, deeply grieved, by an absence of two whole issues, and no doubt you have too, old dear. But don't let it bother you. It'll be at least four issues before I disappear.

But now to business. At least I suppose one would call editing (?) that magazine business. Honestly, at times I think that you merely print any story that comes in, without looking at it. Just keep on adding stories to the stack on the desk until you have enough for one issue. Heartless, ain't it?

I wandered into the newsstand on a wave of sailors, Saturday night, and rubbing my eyes over the racks, had turned and was about to go out, when something, call it intuition, evil spirits, or what have you, poked me, and whispered, "Could that have been the Thrilling Wonder Stories that you just saw?" I stopped horror-stricken, and turned.

Yes, it was! Horror to end all crowning horrors. A BEM which wasn't a BEM! A woman with opaque clothes on! No hero! Or is the semi-BEM the hero? If so why is the woman screaming, and why is he holding there is target range for the snake? Does that skull in the lower right hand corner belong to that thing on the left side of the page, or is it something which just slipped in from Saturday night? And weirdest of all, what is that signature in the corner? With a growing sense of horror, realizing it had finally happened, I slipped screaming to the floor.

I awoke to find the man from the hospital sitting on my head, the proprietor looking sympathetic and even the sailors not looking at me as if I were something which had just crawled out from under a flat stone. No Bergey!!!! Tell us quick, Sarge, was it suicide, murder, or just vacation? If it's a vacation, bring him back. Never again will I complain about his pattern of BEM, horrified dame, and rescuing muscle-bound. Please, Sarge, bring him back!

I was so unnerved by this shock, that it was a full day before I could bring myself to read the thing. Would that I had waited until completely recovered. I'm incurable now, they say. Point number one.

Belarski can't read the thing as Bergey could, and maybe less NOWHERE, MINOUE, DOES THAT THING GRAB HER BY THE ARM WHEN THERE IS A SNAKE COMING. ALWAYS IT IS George!!!! Please, please, don't do these things. Every issue somebody or other complains about this feature of your artists, and every issue the same thing happens.

Having wandered by now to page six, I am again horribly shocked. A portrait of Uncle Louie, and by Belarski again. Then looking closer, I see. It is not Belarski. Obviously the boy has studied under him however. But it is Uncle Louie! Why didn't you write, you old rascal? By the way, just as a side question, who is that character, finger pointing outward like an enlistment poster?

To the stories! I wish I could send in a record of this letter, so you could know how that sounds when spoken. Something like the guy caught in the harem quarters must have sounded saying, "To the kitchen," the day the sultan decided to cook with oil. "The Eternal Now." Not so bad, at that. But the theme is getting a trifle time-worn, don't you think. Thinking that, you can imagine my opinion of that last man deal. Well-written, though. "Bleated Brain." Good, good. New idea, finally. "Beyond the Vortex." I'm still reeling from that one! I can't say that that is like anything I ever ran up against before, though. It confused me brutally. By rights I should have liked it, but it displeased me, vaguely. Now ain't that a shame? "Mongrovan Caravan" was different, somehow, but it was bearable. "The Gadget" was about the same as the usual run of Tubby stories. I prefer Cummings in something else besides Tubby. "The Ultimate Analysis" hit the spot.

Now for a few verbal bombs placed where they will stir up nearly all of your readers, into a race to do battle and make of me a persecuted minority. If Brown wants battle, he sure picked a good way to start it. I'd argue with him but I know darn well the majority of your readers will argue anyway, and I just haven't got the heart to side in with him. I like L.B.'s writing too much for that even to start a battle. Those puns you two banded about were enough to turn my heart against puns forever.

By the time I hit Krueger's letter, it occurred to



me that all those repeated mentions of double-spacing might mean something. Are we supposed to do that now? You paperwaster, traitor, fiend! I bet I've got the reason too. If everybody double-spaces their letters, then nobody will have paper enough to send in so-called stories, and the dear old Sarge won't see pink humans through his Xeno fumes.

By the way, what is high score for Krueger as he babbles about 7¼ etc.? Also what is high score for Hunter, with his three-place decimals. That's going too far. And by the way, climbing a tree is not running, right. But just the same with a bear around, anyone who climbs a tree might be said to be scared. Right. Now, is he scared, or isn't he, or does he think he's Tarzan, or is his wife up the tree?

Pardon, but Gibson's letter has me a bit more confused than the rest of the droolings. Was the mag started in 1939 or 1929? I thought 1929, but he comes up with 1949 just to make the picture more complete. A man with vision. Please let me know, is he kidding, or did it begin in '39?

Speaking of hard to get STF, I don't even know if Cap Future is still published. I haven't seen one since last winter. Sarge, I don't like to complain, but I'll report you to the SPCA for this: No. 1 War-Tears. No. 2 War-Ears. Make up your mind. These guys ain't human. Whadda you guys want on the cover, anyway, a dame in the latest fashion of business suit?

Well, I suppose that if you ever entertain ideas of publishing this insult to your authors, artists and readers, it will be cut in half anyway, so I might as well stop.—Dickinson, North Dakota.

And about time, too, pee-lot. So ye Sarge is befuddled by Xeno fumes! Not after all these years, you Solar scorpion. What has him reaching for the nearest ray gun with hara kiri in mind is letters like yours, Kiwi Trucano. Hereafter, do double space your letters and make them half as long. The scoring business is settled now, we hope, hope, hope against hope.

And TWS did first see the light of day in 1929. Taking advantage of such a meagre typographical error in times like these when all good proofreaders are at the front is like picking further on Wart-ears.

Consider yourself hereby fined fifty gallons of Xeno to be delivered on Uranus at ye Sarge's little nest in the west no later than one week from Tuesday, otherwise, you'll have a Xeno-mortgage placed on your supply by the interplanetary police! Remember, a week from Tuesday. Our local supply should last just about that long with careful nursing.

## PLEA FOR THE FUTUREMEN

By Phil Barker

Dear Sarge: I have read CAPTAIN FUTURE ever since the 6th issue. Is it possible to buy back numbers. as I would like to read "The Space Emperor," "The Magic of Mars," etc.?

Please try to publish CAPTAIN FUTURE monthly or even bi-monthly. I for one hate to wait so long. And say, Sarge, why don't you try Quaxl the famous Jovian Joy Juice it will make you see—and hear (a feature which Xeno hasn't got) pink Denebian Dior Dogs with purple polka dots and green stripes. Drink Quaxl and see (and hear) the System!

Wait, stop, hold the ship. I forgot to ask what color is Joan's hair, and I'm not getting personal but on one cover her hair was brown, on another, black, then sort of a reddish gold, then it was blond. Good Gad the gal must be buying out the dye stores or else the artist must not be able to make up his mind.—Tacoma, Washington.

As you must know by now, pee-lot, CAPTAIN FUTURE is sharing space in our companion magazine STARTLING STORIES

(Turn page)

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for the duration, and the regular Futuremen novels will appear from time to time within the covers of that magazine.

As to Quaxl, you and your Jovian Joy Juice can take a flying jump in the infinite! The one and only time a space siren inveigled us into trying it in a pleasure palace on Athena, we lost our wallet and three rare Mercurian pocket-pouches we were carrying to Neptune, where the market was at its peak.

Furthermore, when we came to and found the siren gone with the pocketbook, its interplanetary certificates of negotiable credit and the pouches, we saw a lot more than pink Dendian Dlor Dogs with purple polka dots and green stripes. You'll have to write us a confidential letter to get the grisly details of that horrendous morning after. Quaxl isn't fit for the iron men of Jupiter themselves.

One more item—surely, Kiwi Barker, you have been treading the spaceways long enough to know that a gentleman never shows surprise when a young lady turns up with her hair a new shade. Especially, since the discovery of the Actean color-bulb roots that do double duty in seventeen tints as shampoo as well as hair dye. Joan Randall's hair color is her own business, get that?

## COINCIDENCE DEPARTMENT

By Juanita Ullman

Ye Noble Sarge: I am a recent convert to THRILLING WONDER STORIES. I have enjoyed them no end. I am aware that no man has a monopoly on writing stories about the last man in the world. But it seems to me I have read a few years back a story that bore a startling similarity to "The Last Man in New York," with the exception of a few details. Could be coincidental, of course.—Hanford, Washington.

Could be and was, praise the nine worlds. A good idea is a good idea, no matter how often and how many authors test it out. Even Shakespeare's "Hamlet" was derived from a German drama of a century earlier entitled "Hammet, Prince of Denmark" which was virtually the same in plot as the Bard's more famous version. And his comedy stemmed directly from the Latins, Terence and Plautus, who got most of their gags from the Greeks. What makes a story different is not plot, but the individuality, slant and imagination of the author.

## HE GIVES US THE EDGE

By Millard Grimes

Dear Sarge: Here's a new policy I think THRILLING WONDER STORIES and STARTLING STORIES should adopt. I know you want to hear about it. In SS, instead of having a long novel and several shorts, why not have

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the long novel and the short novel in TWS, and in TWS, just have novelets and shorts. The Fall issue of **THRILLING WONDER STORIES** is a partial example, because "The Eternal Now" was not much longer than the novelets. By the way, the Fall number was much better than the summer, but I'm not going to rate the stories (sigh of relief).

Sarge, would you please explain even to me how your mag gets rough edges. It seems to me that when your copies were separated that the instrument that separated them would cut the edges smooth. What do you use? A hacksaw?

Anyway, I have invented a method, which if properly applied will give the fans a smooth edge magazine. The readers have to apply my method, so it won't be extra work on the publishers.

Draw a line down the side of the cover, so that all the rough edges will be on the outside of the line. Then, take a razor or some sharp instrument and cut straight down the line. Do the same to the top and bottom and you will have a slick mag (this method not guaranteed, but if any fans have luck with it, notify me and I might try it myself).—Columbus, Georgia.

Let's see if we have this straight, kiwi. You want SS to run the two novels, while TWS sticks to novelets and shorts. Where is your sense of balance? I scent a whiff of Xeno on your Venus-lotos-blossom-scented breath—a whiff of an overdose of Xeno. Fans, tell this pee-lot the facts of life. We're tired of birds and bees on all of the nine planets and twenty-eight satellites.

You can blame the rough page edges on Snaggle-tooth. What with the war and everything, he's been doing his bit between running for jugs of Xeno by snipping off the paper on which TWS is printed. His peculiar mouth formation and dental serrations cause the snaggle effect. Cute?

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Apologies to Pee-lot Walt Dunkelberger for the wrong address given in this space a (Turn page)

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couple of issues back. As Mrs. Frankey must know if she has been reading the indignant letters, Walt resides at 1443 Fourth Avenue, South, Fargo, North Dakota. Here's hoping she is already in touch with him.

Walt, by the way, has been active as all get out. With Earl Kay, he was able, by cajoling his wife, Lorraine, and his five-year-old son, Jimmy, to sign up, to obtain enough new SFL members to start a Minn-Dak Chapter of the League. Jimmy is probably the youngest member in history. Any fan who knows of one younger, write in and let us know.

Such activity won him one of Bergey's best original covers as well as the usual cards, charter, insignia, and so on. Maybe some more of you STF fans can get going and organize SFL chapters.

Here's how it's done—assemble a quorum of seven or more members, adopt a chapter name, elect officers, frame a constitution and write in to the mother league here in New York for a charter.

If you wish to join the SFL on your own, simply fill out the application coupon below and send it to us with the name-strip of this magazine. This will win you a membership card without further expense or obligation. Should you desire an emblem to wear, 15c in stamps with your application will win one from ye olde Sarge. It is a handsome blue, maroon and gold button with an SFL emblem.

But the emblems aren't going to last much longer, so write in now—or wait until their manufacture is resumed when the war is won.

*A pee-lot who hits his space warps on the nose*

*Will get home safe no matter where he goes.*

Well, the Sarge has got to blast off now to collect that fine of fifty jugs of Xeno from Kiwi Trucano. Be seeing you when we get back on our pedicles.

—SERGEANT SATURN.

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2-45

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# THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

**W**ELL, kiwis, this department is a doublebarreled one this time, thanks to swell missive from typewriter peelots Barnes and Brown, so the Sarge won't take up much space. Peelot Art Barnes, using a jet-propelled carrier pigeon to get his tale of how "Fog over Venus" happened to zoom all the way from North



Hollywood, California, to the Sarge's current camping ground on a Uranian satellite, seems to feel that space pioneering is going to be rough, tough and nasty business when it comes. Says he—

"Fog Over Venus" probably cannot be classified as a conventional science fiction story. There are no dooms released upon the Earth, no interplanetary wars, no beautiful virgins nor evil robots nor fourth dimensions.

These omissions were calculated, however, because what I wished to do in this yarn was to illumine realistically the history of the future—with real people of the future as they will meet real obstacles of the future with weapons of the future, people and obstacles and weapons predicated upon the knowledge of today and yesterday.

The idea germ of this story came to me, I think, after reading a biographical sketch some years ago about a two-fisted adventurer who carved himself a little empire in South America. It occurred to me that his troubles were small compared to the things entrepreneurs of the future would face when trying to open up new planets.

Too, his tools were puny compared to the things science would put at the future pioneer's disposal. From there, it was a quick jump to the struggle portrayed in Fog Over Venus, the eternal battle of transportation which has figured in human history since the dawn of civilization. I believe implicitly in the future as I've pictured it in fiction. Before we make colonial suburbs out of the inner planets, it will be a grim and bloody business. The miracles of science's inexhaustible ingenuity will be necessary for victory—without them even a John Buckmaster or a Gerry Carlyle (or even Pete Manx!) would be helpless as a savage on Venus. We shall advance only as rapidly as the brains and laboratories of our scientists give us the means.

But—all the scientific advances of the next thousand years will be worthless without the kind of man it takes to apply them with vision. And that will require the rugged kind of individuals in the bitter war against nature, hard and lusty and ruthless and brilliant men.

It will take more than a curly-haired blond hero  
(Turn page)

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with a ray-gun, debonairly wiping out a bunch of nasty natives to rescue the gal. It will take tough guys, willing to spill their blood—guys like Buckmaster, whom you may not like, but whom you've got to respect. Pioneering has always been like that, and always will be. Science's tools must be complemented by Man's courage and eagerness to fight and even die for Progress.

That's the raw material I used for *Fog Over Venus*. It's the stuff of drama, worthy of a better writer, but even as fumbling an author as myself should be able to do something with it. I sincerely hope the readers enjoy what I've managed to make of it for TWS.

—ART BARNES

Fred Brown, who lives happily amidst the giant beer vats of Milwaukee, blames the birth of "Pi in the Sky" on a semi-celestial nightmare. Those practical souls who enjoy a curl of the upper lip at dreamers will have to take a back seat for once—way back. Peetlot Brown made this dream pay in the following fashion—

I've always told people that I've never dreamed up a plot, but as I think back to the inception of "Pi in the Sky," I'm afraid I'll have to qualify that statement. The original idea which later evolved into the plot of "Pi in the Sky" actually was part of a bona fide asleep-in-bed dream.

In that dream I was alone—out in a field, I believe—looking up at the night sky. A strange sky in which the stars were in geometrical formations. Neat and symmetrical patterns of squares and triangles and a huge spoke wheel that revolved slowly.

As I watched, a feeling of cold terror—terror of I knew not what—grew and became so acute that I awakened. And, believe it or not, I turned on the light and smoked a cigarette to get rid of that awful sky and the hangover of fear that it had left in my mind.

Ordinarily, I forget dreams completely within a few minutes of waking up. Possibly the reason that I remembered this one and still remember it was that, while I smoked that cigarette I tried to dispel it by deliberately thinking about it. I tried to analyze the cause of the feeling of fear that accompanied the dream.

Why should an orderly, patterned sky be such a terrifying thing to look upon? I've never found an exact, categorical answer to that question.

But the memory of the dream stuck to me, and eventually it evolved into "Pi in the Sky." Of course, in "Pi in the Sky," the stars do not form abstract patterns. They form—but whoa, possibly some reader is dipping here in the back of the book before he's read the story itself, and if so I'm not going to give away my gimmick. He can find it out in the same slow and painful manner in which Roger Jerome Phlutter, of Cole Observatory, found it out. Starting with Pollux...

—FREDRIC BROWN

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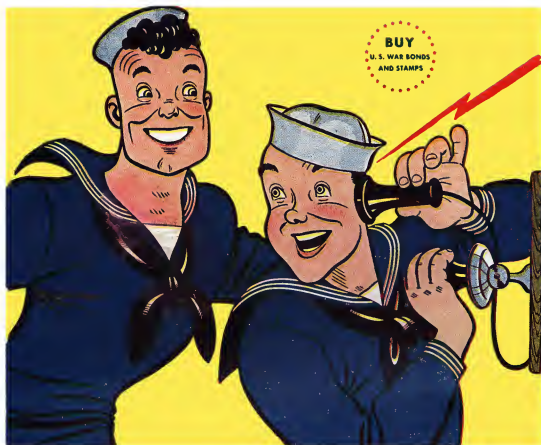
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